

## **Elections Nova Scotia**

### **2023 – 2024 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>2023–2024 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>	8
Legislative changes for the next election	
<b>Conclusion and Required Actions</b>	9
<b>Appendix</b>	
1. 2023-2024 Treasury Board Target (Dec 2022) Reconciliation	10
2. Elections Nova Scotia Budget Plan Summary	11
3. Vision, Mission, Mandate, Values, and Goals	12
4. Organizational Chart	13

## Recommendation to the Special Committee

Elections Nova Scotia (ENS) presents a budget of \$4.671m for the 2023-2024 fiscal year to the Special Committee of the House of Assembly. This amount includes ENS's administrative requirements, the estimated cost of running one potential by-election, external legal counsel, and service delivery to achieve the ENS mandate. 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 2023-2024 provincial budget.

## 2023–2024 Budget Estimates

The following schedule provides a summary of ENS's 2023-2024 budget estimates, as well as supplementary information that compares this to the 2022-2023 plan.

### ELECTIONS NOVA SCOTIA

<u>Departmental Expenses by Object (\$ thousands)</u>	<b>2022-2023 Submitted to Special Committee</b>	<b>2022-2023 Approved Budget Estimate</b>	<b>2022-2023 Forecast</b>	<b>2023-2024 Estimate to Special Committee</b>
Salary and Employee benefits	1,953	2,036	1,803	2,118
Operating Costs	2,317	2,020	2,008	2,553
Gross Expenses	4,270	4,056	3,811	4,671
Less: Chargeable to Other Departments	-	-	-	-
<b>Total- Elections Nova Scotia</b>	<b>4,270</b>	<b>4,056</b>	<b>3,811</b>	<b>4,671</b>
<b>Ordinary recoveries</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>Funded Staff (# of FTEs)</b>	18	18	16	19
Less: staff Funded by External Agencies	-	-	-	-
<b>Total- Funded Staff</b>	18	18	16	19

**Supplementary Information**

<b><u>Programs and Services (\$ thousands)</u></b>	<b>2022-2023 Submitted to Special Committee</b>	<b>2022-2023 Approved Budget Estimate</b>	<b>2022-2023 Forecast</b>	<b>2023-2024 Estimate to Special Committee</b>
Administration	2,788	2,887	2,643	2,996
Registered Party Funding	782	769	804	835
Service Delivery and Development Election readiness COVID-19 related	400	400	300	590
External legal council	50			
By-election	250			250
Election related			64	
<b>Totals</b>	<b><u>4,270</u></b>	<b><u>4,056</u></b>	<b><u>3,811</u></b>	<b><u>4,671</u></b>

## Budget Overview

The Provincial General Election (PGE) that took place on August 17, 2021 forced the delay of the completion of several projects the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) had recommended to the committee in January 2022. Consequently, projects were delayed due to the election, and will continue in the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

As part of the PGE cycle, ENS must request readiness funding in the last two of the four years before a general election. This pattern is similar to the election budgeting cycles in other provinces where funding ramps up in the 18-month period before a fixed date election occurs. The 2024-2025 fiscal budget will include election readiness funding of approximately \$2.0m.

ENS published a new five-year Strategic Plan in July 2022 that defines the election readiness priorities as we prepare for the July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025 PGE. The following commitments were made by the organization that guide ENS through the next years:

- Enhance electoral process for all Nova Scotians through inclusion, diversity, equity and access
- Build relationships and partnerships with stakeholders
- Lead in the modernization of electoral services
- Foster a team culture that sets staff up for success
- Support election workers to excel in service delivery

Related to the first commitment, ENS is seeking funding approval of \$85k for the 2023-2024 fiscal year to support the establishment of a new permanent full-time equivalent (FTE) position for a Senior Outreach Coordinator to support ENS's inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility programming. A permanent position is needed to resource ENS's outreach work properly because there is no capacity in the existing team to develop and lead a sustainable program. Hiring a permanent Senior Outreach Coordinator, that represents one or more of the designated diversity groups in Nova Scotia, is a best-practice approach and shows that the Province of Nova Scotia is committed to equity to support the participation of special elector groups in democracy.

## Budget Breakdown

For the purposes of clarity and transparency, ENS routinely presents its yearly budget request to the committee under three distinct pillars of spending. A fourth category of spending, **Other**, identifies highly probable spending which would be beyond the agency's control and should be identified:

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 identifies the costs associated with the delivery of ENS’s mandate. The preparation for (but not the delivery of) PGEs, by-elections and the scheduled maintenance of the provincial register of electors. This budget fluctuates greatly over the election cycle with the bulk of election readiness funding to be spent in the 18 months preceding July 2025.
3. **Registered Party Funding and Electoral District Associations subsidy for bookkeeping** – The third pillar identifies the CEO’s mandatory political funding obligations to the registered parties and the estimated financial assistance earmarked for electoral district associations’ (EDA) bookkeeping requirements as legislated in the *Elections Act*.
4. **Other** – Election delivery costs, including paying election officials, leasing returning offices and voting locations, and candidate spending reimbursements. PGE costs are funded by warrant and not normally included in ENS annual budget requests.

By-elections\* on the other hand, are not funded by warrants. In recent years, at least one by-election has been called per year. Based on this history, ENS requests a budget line for the delivery of one by-election per year.

Similarly, from time-to-time, ENS is required to conduct investigations under the *Elections Act* of registered parties, EDA’s or registered candidates that require independent advice and counsel. ENS has no foreknowledge of these incidents or complaints filed but must respond to the circumstances as presented. Therefore, a budget line for outside counsel is routinely identified in this submission.

*\*Note: Should more than one by-election be required in a fiscal year, ENS would submit the additional costs incurred to Finance, Treasury and Policy Board as pressures of extraordinary spending. Should no by-election occur or no requirement for outside independent legal counsel occur, ENS expects to realize a surplus that would be returned to the Province’s general revenue fund.*

## Planning Assumptions

The planning assumptions for ENS’s 2023-2024 budget estimates are:

- With the introduction of a of a fixed election date, ENS will prepare for the next PGE date of July 15, 2025.
- Continuation of the development of the e-voting system to be introduced in 2025 for electors who are members of the military posted outside of Nova Scotia.
- Outreach initiative that was outlined in the Strategic Plan
- One by-election may be held in the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

- The ongoing service delivery activity remains funded at approximately \$250k for 2023-2024.
- Funding for external legal services of \$52k to ensure independence of the office of the CEO with respect to investigations and to protect the Department of Justice assigned counsel from potential conflicts of interest situations.

## Outline of Budget Schedules

- Appendix 1 is a budget schedule that provides a summary of the budget pressures submitted to Finance, Treasury and Policy Board in November 2022.
- Appendix 2 provides a summary of the ENS budget plan. This shows the cost breakdown of the additional funding required for:
  - Incremental registered party annual payment that resulted from the August 2021 PGE.
  - The PGE forced delay in the e-voting program will require \$250k, for which an offsetting forecast reduction in 2021-22 has been submitted to Finance, Treasury and Policy Board.
  - The incremental cost for an outreach officer is also identified.
  - Costs for a by-election, outside legal service costs and the ongoing delivery of the ENS mandate have also been identified.

## What Elections Nova Scotia Does

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

In accordance with the Strategic Plan, major activities planned for the 2023-2024 fiscal year include a continuation of the development of the e-voting system and preparation for the 41<sup>st</sup> PGE.

With the passing of the fixed election date legislation in 2021, ENS is now preparing for the general election date in July of 2025. This surety permits more efficient work plans moving forward and without the prospect of duplicating efforts.

Within 72 hours of the 55 writs being issued, ENS opens returning offices in each electoral district employing approximately 300 trained core staff and offering province-wide early voting options at each location.

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

## The Elections Nova Scotia Team

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 covers all operational and financial aspects of the electoral process as well as candidate and registered party related services, support and regulation.

Appendix 4 includes ENS's current organization chart.



## Current Challenges

### Legislative and operational changes for the next election

Following the 41<sup>st</sup> PGE held on August 17, 2021, a fixed date has been legislated for July 15, 2025, the activities at ENS will be more predictable than in the past. Further legislative changes have been recommended that will enhance administration and delivery of elections in Nova Scotia.

In January 2022, this Special Committee reviewed and recommended without alteration the CEO's budget estimate of \$4.27m for the 2022-2023 fiscal year. The final budget amount of \$4.056m was included in the FTB estimates in March 2022. The budget estimate included \$150k of funding for the development of an e-voting system. This work will extend into 2023-2024 and an additional \$250k is included in the estimates.

## Conclusion and Required Actions

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

- associated with additional registered party funding due to higher voter count as required by statute;
- to maintain the mandate of ENS including:
  - stakeholder outreach, ongoing IT system maintenance, security testing, routine register of electors' maintenance, RO advisory panel meetings, report production, review of financial reports and systematic regulation of political entities;
- for the establishment of a permanent FTE to lead election outreach activities
- for external legal counsel; and,
- for one by-election.

We also request that members of the Special Committee recommend the budget, without alteration, to Finance, Treasury and Policy Board be included in the 2023-2024 provincial budget estimates.

ENS also commits to communicate to the Special Committee the final amounts approved by Finance, Treasury and Policy Board and, if necessary, include an analysis of any differences from what the Special Committee has recommended.

## Appendix 1

### 2023-2024 Treasury Board Target (Dec. 16, 2022) Reconciliation

2023-2024 Target reconciliation	(\$'000)
<b>Annual cost as per Target (received December 16, 2022)</b>	<b>3,943</b>
<b>Pressures:</b>	
<b>Administration</b>	
Legal counsel - independence	52
Mandate- independence	52
Rent obligation	21
Contractual Obligation	21
<b>Subtotal Administration pressure</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Public Funding based on 2021 PGE</b>	
Party funding increase due to increase in votes	65
Contractual Obligation	65
<b>Subtotal Public Finding pressure</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Service delivery</b>	
E-voting program (delayed from 2021-22)	250
Approved Commitment	250
Outreach strategy	90
New Emerging Priority	90
<b>Subtotal Service Delivery pressure</b>	<b>340</b>
<b>Election</b>	
One by-election	250
Mandate	250
<b>Subtotal Election Pressure</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>Total pressures</b>	<b>728</b>
<b>Total Cost Elections Nova Scotia</b>	<b>4,671</b>

## Appendix 2

	Forecast						
	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27		
<b>Annual cost as per Target (\$'000)</b>							
Administration	2,643	2,923	2,887	2,887	2,887		
Public Funding based on 2021 PGE	804	770	771	772	772		
Service delivery	300	250	250	250	250		
Subtotal Ongoing	<b>3,747</b>	<b>3,943</b>	<b>3,908</b>	<b>3,909</b>	<b>3,909</b>		
<b>Pressures:</b>							
<b>Administration</b>							
Legal counsel - independence			Mandate- independence	52	53	54	55
Outreach officer			New Emerging Priority				
Rent obligation			Contractual Obligation	21	43	65	88
Subtotal Administration pressure	-	73		96	119	143	
<b>Public Funding based on 2021 PGE</b>							
Party funding increase due to increase in votes			Contractual Obligation	65	83	102	120
Subtotal Public Finding pressure	-	65		83	102	120	
<b>Service delivery</b>							
E-voting program (delayed from 2021-22)			Approved Commitment	250	50	20	
Outreach strategy			New Emerging Priority	90	94	94	94
Election readiness			Mandate		2,000	460	
Subtotal Service Delivery pressure	-	340		2,144	574	94	
<b>Election</b>							
One by-election			Mandate	250	255	260	265
Provincial General Election			Mandate	64		13,918	
Subtotal Election Pressure	64	250		255	14,178	265	
<b>Total pressures</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>728</b>		<b>2,578</b>	<b>14,973</b>	<b>622</b>	
<b>Total Cost Elections Nova Scotia</b>	<b>3,811</b>	<b>4,671</b>		<b>6,486</b>	<b>18,882</b>	<b>4,531</b>	

## 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
  - Innovation

### **COMMITMENTS:**

- Enhance the electoral process for all Nova Scotians through inclusion, diversity, equity and access
- Build relationships and partnerships with stakeholders
- Lead in the modernization of electoral services
- Foster a team culture that sets staff up for success
- Support election workers to excel in service delivery

## Appendix 4

### Elections Nova Scotia Organization Chart

