

Elections Nova Scotia

2024 – 2025 Budget Estimates

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



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Recommendation to the Special Committee

Elections Nova Scotia (ENS) presents a budget of \$9.269M for the 2024-2025 fiscal year to the Special Committee of the House of Assembly. This amount includes ENS's administrative requirements, external legal counsel, the estimated cost of running one potential by-election, election readiness funding to deliver the 42nd Provincial General Election, and funding for the introduction of digital voter registration on election day to achieve modernization of the electoral process. 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 2024-2025 provincial budget.

2024–2025 Budget Estimates

The following schedule provides a summary of ENS's 2024-2025 budget estimates, as well as supplementary information that compares this to the 2023-2024 plan.

ELECTIONS NOVA SCOTIA

<u>Departmental Expenses by Object</u> <u>(\$ thousands)</u>	2023-2024	2023-2024	2023-2024	2024-2025
	<u>Submitted to Special Committee</u>	<u>Approved Budget Estimate</u>	<u>December Forecast</u>	<u>Estimate to Special Committee</u>
Salary and Employee benefits	2,118	2,077	2,149	2,198
Operating Costs	<u>2,553</u>	<u>2,232</u>	<u>2,513</u>	<u>7,071</u>
Gross Expenses	4,671	4,309	4,662	9,269
Less: Chargeable to Other Departments	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Total- Elections Nova Scotia	<u>4,671</u>	<u>4,309</u>	<u>4,662</u>	<u>9,269</u>
Ordinary recoveries	-	-	(4)	-
Funded Staff (# of FTEs)	<u>19.0</u>	<u>18.0</u>	<u>18.0</u>	<u>19.0</u>
Less: staff Funded by External Agencies	-	-	-	-
Total- Funded Staff	<u>19.0</u>	<u>18.0</u>	<u>18.0</u>	<u>19.0</u>

Supplementary Information

<u>Programs and Services</u> <u>(\$ thousands)</u>	<u>2023-2024</u> <u>Submitted</u> <u>to Special</u> <u>Committee</u>	<u>2023-2024</u> <u>Approved</u> <u>Budget</u> <u>Estimate</u>	<u>2023-2024</u> <u>December</u> <u>Forecast</u>	<u>2024-2025</u> <u>Estimate</u> <u>to Special</u> <u>Committee</u>
Administration	2,944	2,984	2,974	3,129
Registered Party Funding	835	825	865	886
Service Delivery and Development	590	500	500	300
Election readiness				1,612
External legal council	52		50	53
By-election	250		273	250
Election related				3,039
Total-Elections Nova Scotia	<u>4,671</u>	<u>4,309</u>	<u>4,662</u>	<u>9,269</u>

Budget Overview

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 budget includes election readiness funding of approximately \$1.6M.

ENS published a new five-year Strategic Plan in July 2022 that defines the election readiness priorities as we prepare for the July 15, 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 permanent funding of \$112K and 1.0FTE for an Outreach Coordinator position 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 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.

Additionally, related to the third commitment, ENS is seeking funding approval of \$3.0M for the 2024-2025 fiscal year to support digital registration on election day. Provincial elections in Nova Scotia are delivered in a professional manner and are proud to be one of the most modern in Canada. The next logical step in our modernization journey is to begin modernizing our services on election day to align with services offered at early voting locations. This will provide more streamlined and efficient registration process on election day, real time digital elector strike-off to reduce the risk of an elector attempting to vote more than once, easier data access for candidate's campaigns, and timely production of the final list of electors for use by our stakeholders following election day.

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, travel, and training 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 majority of election readiness funding to be spent in the 18-month period 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 political 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 special warrant and not normally approved through the annual budget process.

By-elections* on the other hand, are not funded by special warrant. 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, EDAs 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 2024-2025 budget estimates are:

- With the introduction of a fixed election date, ENS will prepare for the next PGE date of July 15, 2025. Majority of the training of election workers is planned in April and May 2025.
- Outreach initiative that was outlined in the Strategic Plan, including the addition of one FTE.
- One by-election may be held in the 2024-2025 fiscal year.
- Lead in the modernization of electoral services outlined in the Strategic Plan by offering digital registration on election day.
- Funding for external legal services 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 October 2023.
- Appendix 2 provides a summary of the ENS budget plan. This shows the cost breakdown of the additional funding required for:
 - Incremental annual payments to registered political parties due to annual CPI increase.
 - Funding and 1.0FTE for an outreach coordinator position.
 - A by-election, outside legal service costs and the ongoing delivery of the ENS mandate.
 - The preparation of the 42nd Provincial General Election held on July 15, 2025.
 - Delivering digital voter registration at all voting locations on election day.

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 2024-2025 fiscal year are as following:

- Preparation for the 42nd PGE including procurement and deployment of election materials and field technology, recruiting and training of core staff to be election ready, and voting location inspection.
- Procurement, setup, and testing of technology for the introduction of digital voter registration on election day.
- Development and implementation of the outreach strategy.

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 41st 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. The latest timeline for introduction of these changes is in the spring 2024 sitting of the legislature. This will provide adequate time to incorporate all modifications in the training program and materials for returning office staff, official agents of parties, candidates and third parties.

In January 2023, this Special Committee reviewed and recommended without alteration the CEO's budget estimate of \$4.671M for the 2023-2024 fiscal year. The final budget amount of \$4.309M was included in the provincial budget in March 2023. The budget estimate included \$250K funding for the development of an e-voting system.

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 annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) increase 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;
 - to prepare for the 42nd Provincial General Election held on July 15, 2025.
- for the establishment of a permanent FTE to lead election outreach activities;
- for external legal counsel;
- for one by-election; and
- for providing digital voter registration at all voting locations on election day.

We also request that members of the Special Committee recommend the budget, without alteration, to Finance, Treasury and Policy Board be included in the 2024-2025 provincial budget.

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

2024-2025 Treasury Board Target (December 12, 2023) Reconciliation

2024-2025 Target reconciliation	(\$'000)	FTE
Annual cost as per Target (received December 12, 2023)	4,174	18.0
Pressures:		
Administration		
Legal counsel - independence	Mandate- independence	53
Outreach strategy	New Emerging Priority	112
Sub-total Administration pressure	165	1.0
Public Funding based on 2021 PGE		
Party funding increase due to CPI increase	Contractual Obligation	29
Sub-total Public Funding pressure	29	-
Service delivery		
Election readiness	Mandate	1,612
Technology on Election Day	New Emerging Priority	3,039
Sub-total Service Delivery pressure	4,651	-
Election		
One by-election	Mandate	250
Sub-total Election Pressure	250	-
Total pressures	5,095	1.0
Total Estimate-Elections Nova Scotia	9,269	19.0

Appendix 2

Elections Nova Scotia Budget Plan Summary

		2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
		Forecast				
Annual cost as per Target (\$'000)						
Administration		2,974	3,017	3,034	3,053	3,053
Public Funding based on 2021 PGE		825	857	876	894	894
Service delivery		500	300	270	250	250
Sub-total Ongoing		4,299	4,174	4,180	4,197	4,197
Pressures:						
Administration						
Legal counsel - independence	Mandate- independence	50	53	54	55	56
Outreach Strategy	New Emerging Priority		112	112	112	112
Sub-total Administration pressure		50	165	166	167	168
Public Funding based on 2021 PGE						
Party funding increase due to CPI increase	Contractual Obligation	40	29	29	29	47
Sub-total Public Funding pressure		40	29	29	29	47
Service delivery						
Election readiness	Mandate		1,612	657	-	-
Technology on Election Day	New Emerging Priority		3,039	23	-	-
Sub-total Service Delivery pressure		-	4,651	680	-	-
Election						
One by-election	Mandate	273	250	-	-	-
Provincial General Election	Mandate			15,938	150	
Sub-total Election Pressure		273	250	15,938	150	-
Total pressures		363	5,095	16,813	346	215
Total Estimate-Elections Nova Scotia		4,662	9,269	20,993	4,543	4,412

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

