



Elections Nova Scotia

2025 – 2026 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 \$7.523M for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to the Special Committee of the House of Assembly. This amount includes ENS's administrative requirements, and additional funding for purchasing election IT equipment, to conclude the 42<sup>nd</sup> Provincial General Election (PGE), one potential by-election, external legal counsel, and outreach strategy initiatives. ENS respectfully requests that the Special Committee review and recommend without alteration the 2025-2026 budget estimates to Treasury and Policy Board to be included in the 2025-2026 provincial budget.

## 2025–2026 Budget Estimates

The following schedule provides a summary of ENS's 2025-2026 budget estimates, as well as supplementary information.

### ELECTIONS NOVA SCOTIA

<b><u>Departmental Expenses by Object</u></b> (\$ thousands)	<b>2024-2025 Submitted to Special Committee</b>	<b>2024-2025 Approved Budget Estimate</b>	<b>2024- 2025 December Forecast</b>	<b>2025-2026 Estimate to Special Committee</b>
Salary and Employee benefits	2,198	2,190	2,184	2,258
Operating Costs	7,071	3,222	17,877	5,265
Gross Expenses	9,269	5,412	20,061	7,523
Less: Chargeable to Other Departments	-	-	41	-
<b>Total- Elections Nova Scotia</b>	<b>9,269</b>	<b>5,412</b>	<b>20,020</b>	<b>7,523</b>
<b>Ordinary recoveries</b>	-	-	3	-
<b>Funded Staff (# of FTEs)</b>	19	18	17.2	18
Less: staff Funded by External Agencies	-	-	-	-
<b>Total- Funded Staff</b>	19	18	17.2	18

## Supplementary Information

<u>Programs and Services (\$ thousands)</u>	<u>2024-2025 Submitted to Special Committee</u>	<u>2024-2025 Approved Budget Estimate</u>	<u>2024-2025 December Forecast</u>	<u>2025-2026 Estimate to Special Committee</u>
Administration	3,182	3,017	2,908	3,156
Election Costs	4,901	1,209	15,984	3,092
Registered Party Funding	886	886	910	905
Service Delivery and Development	300	300	218	370
<b>Total-Elections Nova Scotia</b>	<b>9,269</b>	<b>5,412</b>	<b>20,020</b>	<b>7,523</b>

## Budget Overview

On October 27, 2024, writs for a PGE were issued and the 42<sup>nd</sup> PGE was delivered on November 26, 2024. Over 6,200 workers were hired across the province to deliver the election in 55 electoral districts. ENS will conclude the 42<sup>nd</sup> PGE in 2025-2026, which includes candidate financial report compliance review, post event debriefs and audit, as well as decommission of tech equipment. Additionally, post election reporting and proposed legislative change recommendations are planned for this fiscal year.

The IT equipment deployed for the last three general elections since 2017 have reached the end of their life cycle, ENS must start procurement of election IT equipment for returning offices and early voting locations in 2025-2026 to prepare for the 43<sup>rd</sup> PGE.

As we approach the last year of the current four-year strategic plan, ENS remains committed to our strategic objectives including the implementation of the outreach strategy. In the fall of 2025, ENS will begin a planning exercise that will result in a new four-year strategic plan, which will define the election readiness priorities as we prepare for the 43<sup>rd</sup> PGE.

## Budget Breakdown

For the purposes of clarity and transparency, ENS routinely presents its annual budget request to the committee under three distinct pillars of spending: **Administration, Service Delivery and Development, Registered Party Funding and Electoral District Associations Subsidy**. A fourth category of spending, **Election Costs**, 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 and associated operational costs.

2. **Service Delivery and Development**– This pillar identifies the costs associated with the delivery of ENS’s mandate, special projects, and the scheduled maintenance of the provincial register of electors.
3. **Registered Party Funding and Electoral District Associations Subsidy**– The third pillar identifies the CEO’s mandatory annual political funding obligations to registered political parties and the estimated financial assistance earmarked for audit, and electoral district associations’ (EDA) bookkeeping requirements as legislated in the *Elections Act*.
4. **Election Costs** – Election readiness and delivery costs, including paying election officials, leasing returning offices and voting locations, and candidate election expense reimbursements. PGE costs are funded by additional appropriation and not normally approved through the annual budget process.

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 engage external counsel for court challenges, investigations and sensitive matters related to the *Elections Act*. ENS has no foreknowledge of these incidents but must respond to the circumstances as presented. Outside legal counsel is required in these incidents to ensure independence of the office of the CEO with respect to investigations and to protect the counsel provided by the Department of Justice from potential conflicts of interest. 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 Treasury and Policy Board as pressures of extraordinary spending. Should no by-election or no requirement for external 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 2025-2026 budget estimates are:

- Conclusion of the 42<sup>nd</sup> PGE.
- Purchase of election IT equipment for returning offices and early voting locations.
- Outreach initiative outlined in the ENS Strategic Plan, which is aligned with government priorities.
- One potential by-election.
- Funding for external legal counsel.

## 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 2024.
- Appendix 2 provides a summary of the ENS budget plan from 2025-2026 to 2028-2029. This shows the breakdown of additional funding required for the next four fiscal years.

## 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.

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 organizational chart.

## Current Challenges

### Legislative and operational changes for the next election

In response to the early call of the 42<sup>nd</sup> PGE, ENS accelerated election readiness plans accordingly. Lessons learned from this election clearly indicated the importance of having a team of returning office staff trained in-person. In preparation for future events, ENS's election readiness program will include in-person training for returning office core staff beginning late 2026 and refreshed on an ongoing basis.

Recruitment and retention of Returning Officers continues to be a priority. Great care is taken to hire qualified workers on a merit basis and retaining staff remains challenging with inherent risks associated with election management.

Following the 41<sup>st</sup> PGE, proposed recommendations for legislative change were made in the post-election report. The report following the 42<sup>nd</sup> PGE will include further recommendations. These proposed changes will further enhance administration and delivery of elections in Nova Scotia.

## Conclusion and Required Actions

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

- to conclude the 42<sup>nd</sup> PGE;
- 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 implementation of outreach strategy;
- for purchase of election IT equipment for returning offices and early voting locations;
- for one potential by-election; and
- for external legal counsel.

We also request that members of the Special Committee recommend the budget, without alteration, to Finance, Treasury and Policy Board be included in the 2025-2026 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

### 2025-2026 Treasury Board Target Reconciliation

2025-2026 Target reconciliation	(\$'000)	FTE
<b>Annual estimate as per Target (received January 24, 2025)</b>	<u>4,770</u>	<u>18.0</u>
<b>Pressures:</b>		
<b>Administration</b>		
External Legal Counsel - independence	Mandate- independence	<u>54</u>
<b>Sub-total Administration</b>	<u>54</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Service Delivery and Development</b>		
Outreach strategy	Government Priority	<u>100</u>
<b>Sub-total Service Delivery and Development</b>	<u>100</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Election Costs</b>		
Election IT Equipment Refresh	Mandate	1,500
42nd Provincial General Election	Mandate	839
One by-election	Mandate	<u>260</u>
<b>Sub-total Election Costs</b>	<u>2,599</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Total Pressures</b>	<u>2,753</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Total Estimate-Elections Nova Scotia</b>	<u><u>7,523</u></u>	<u><u>18.0</u></u>



## Appendix 2

### Elections Nova Scotia Budget Plan Summary

		2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029
		December Forecast				
<b>Annual estimate as per Target (\$'000)</b>						
Administration		2,908	3,102	3,121	3,121	3,121
Election Cost ( <b>Note 1</b> )		15,984	493			
Registered Party Funding		910	905	923	923	923
Service Delivery and Development		218	270	250	250	250
<b>Sub-total Ongoing</b>		<b>20,020</b>	<b>4,770</b>	<b>4,294</b>	<b>4,294</b>	<b>4,294</b>
<b>Pressures:</b>						
<b>Administration</b>						
External Legal counsel ( <b>Note 2</b> )	Mandate- independence		54	55	56	57
<b>Sub-total Administration</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Service Delivery and Development</b>						
Outreach Strategy	Government Priority		100	102	104	106
<b>Sub-total Service Delivery and Development</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Election Costs</b>						
One by-election	Mandate		260	260	260	260
42nd Provincial General Election	Mandate		839			
Election IT equipment refresh	Mandate		1,500			
Election readiness (43rd PGE)	Mandate			500	1,700	700
Technology on Election Day	Mandate			3,800	23	
<b>Sub-total Election Costs</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>2,599</b>	<b>4,560</b>	<b>1,983</b>	<b>960</b>
<b>Total pressures</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>2,753</b>	<b>4,717</b>	<b>2,143</b>	<b>1,123</b>
<b>Total Estimate-Elections Nova Scotia</b>		<b>20,020</b>	<b>7,523</b>	<b>9,011</b>	<b>6,437</b>	<b>5,417</b>

**Note 1:** \$493K election readiness funding approved in the 2024-25 budget. This funding will be returned to the general revenue fund through the forecast process pending on approval of the 2025-26 budget requests.

**Note 2:** 2023-24 actual cost \$61K; 2024-25 forecasted cost \$60K

## 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

