



Elections Manitoba

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

2022-2024

Table of Contents

- Statement of Commitment **5**
- Part I. Elections Manitoba background **6**
- Part II. Programs and Services of Elections Manitoba **12**
- Part III. Stakeholders/Clients **13**
- Part IV. Achievements to date **15**
- Part V. Accessibility consultation, May 31, 2017 **20**
- Part VI. Highlights of accomplishments since 2017 accessibility plan **22**
- Part VII. Outreach for the 2019 general election:..... **23**
- Part VIII. Existing Barriers **24**
- Part IX. Priority Areas **26**
- Part X. Policies **27**
- Part XI. Identifying Initiatives and Actions..... **30**

Preface

Elections Manitoba’s accessibility plan is an ongoing document, with updates issued every two years. Elections Manitoba consults with members of the disabilities community in the preparation of its plan, the development of policies and processes, and the implementation of measures related to the standards under *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act*. Feedback on Elections Manitoba’s accessibility initiatives and actions is always welcome.

Introduction: Why an accessibility plan for Elections Manitoba?

Elections Manitoba has a mandate to make voting accessible. As the organization responsible for ensuring all eligible Manitobans are able to participate in elections, Elections Manitoba is committed to identifying and removing barriers to full participation.

Current election law already provides many ways for Manitobans with disabilities to easily and independently cast a ballot. In December 2013, *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* (AMA) became law. The legislation required public sector organizations to create an accessibility plan and update it regularly. Elections Manitoba continues to build on its achievements in enhancing accessibility to the democratic process in Manitoba.

According to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability, over 230,000 or one in four Manitobans aged 15 years and over, has a disability. This number will grow as our population ages. Barriers to accessibility affect persons with disabilities, their family and friends, and their communities. An accessibility barrier is anything that limits or prevents a person from receiving information, goods and services, from accessing a space or from participating in an activity.

Barriers may be:

- **Attitudinal** - may result in some people being treated differently than others
- **Informational or communication-related** - arise when a person cannot easily receive and/or understand information available to others
- **Technological** - when technology, or the way it is used, is not accessible to people with disabilities
- **Systemic** - policies, practices or procedures that result in unequal access or exclusion for people with disabilities
- **Structural** - when the environment prevents physical access for people with varied abilities

The AMA provides an opportunity for us to review our existing practices and processes, celebrate our accomplishments, and identify priorities for eliminating barriers in the future.

Statement of Commitment



Accessibility is an essential part of free and fair elections. Elections Manitoba is committed to ensuring that all eligible voters can access their democratic right to cast a ballot. Election law in Manitoba includes many accessible voting options and Elections Manitoba has developed practices and policies to support accessibility. Our organization has identified accessibility as an ongoing strategic priority. We will continue to work towards removing barriers to full participation in the democratic process.

Part I. Elections Manitoba background

Elections Manitoba is the office of the chief electoral officer of Manitoba, the independent office of the Legislative Assembly that conducts provincial elections, byelections and referendums. The office is not part of government; we report to the Legislative Assembly as a whole, through the Speaker. We report annually and after each election and byelection.

Elections Manitoba's work is governed by two laws: *The Elections Act* (EA) sets out the way elections are run and *The Election Financing Act* (EFA) sets out the rules for political participants. These include registered parties, candidates, leadership contestants, constituency associations and third parties.

The main role of Elections Manitoba is to oversee the conduct of provincial elections and byelections in Manitoba. We are responsible for developing the processes that ensure elections are free and fair while meeting legislative requirements. When election law is amended, it is our job to put changes into effect in a timely and efficient way.

Election law also gives Elections Manitoba the authority to provide election information to the public. More specifically, it allows us to run election education programs for people and groups that may experience barriers to participation.

Political participants and election volunteers must follow many rules and regulations. Elections Manitoba is the best source of accurate information to assist them in following those rules. Elections Manitoba offers information sessions, guides, manuals and one-on-one assistance to political participants.

Elections Manitoba also publishes financial statements of political participants on our website. The public may also view statements in person at our office, on request. Public disclosure ensures transparency and integrity in election spending.

Structure

Elections Manitoba has a core staff of 23 permanent employees. This number increases during a general election. Headquarters staff grows to approximately 55. Also, the chief electoral officer appoints 57 returning officers (ROs) and 57 assistant returning officers (AROs), one for each electoral division in the province. These officers are responsible for running the election within their own divisions. Each RO/ARO team opens a 'branch office' in their electoral division. ROs and AROs appoint approximately 7,000 people across the province to work as office staff, registration agents, voting officers and in other positions within their own divisions.

Election cycle

The work of Elections Manitoba takes place in a four-year cycle, as general elections are usually held once every four years. Manitoba has a set date for provincial general elections. The 42nd provincial general election was held September 10, 2019, which was just over one year before the set election date. The next set date is October 3, 2023.

In addition to the election itself, the first year of the election cycle includes wrap-up and closing of returning offices, as well as the return of materials to Elections Manitoba. Following this, registered parties, candidates and third parties must file election financial statements to Elections Manitoba, which are reviewed by staff. At the same time, the organization holds debriefing sessions for election staff and permanent staff, and evaluates the conduct of the election. Within six months of the election, Elections Manitoba submits a statement of votes and report on the election to the Legislative Assembly.

To begin the second year of the election cycle, we hold a strategic planning session where we identify priorities and develop high-level plans for election preparations. Year two is focused on detailed planning and implementation, with additional work required when new legislation requires changes to our processes. In years three and four, election activities begin, including training of ROs and AROs, securing office space and voting places, ordering materials, recruiting election staff and advertising.

Referendum

The work of Elections Manitoba takes place in a four-year cycle, as general elections are usually held once every four years. Manitoba has a set date for provincial general elections. The 42nd provincial general election was held September 10, 2019, which was just over one year before the set election date. The next set date is October 3, 2023.

In addition to conducting elections and by-elections, Elections Manitoba has the responsibility of conducting referenda. Four provincial laws require a referendum be held under certain circumstances:

- I. The Manitoba Hydro Act – Referendum required to privatize The Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board
- II. The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Act – Referendum required to increase provincial tax
- III. The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act - Referendum required to privatize The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation
- IV. The Referendum Act – Referendum required to make significant changes to Manitoba’s voting system

A Referendum Act outlining the rules for calling and conducting referenda was passed in June 2019 but has not come into force.



Electoral Divisions Boundaries Commission

Under *The Electoral Divisions Act*, the Electoral Divisions Boundaries Commission reviews provincial boundaries every 10 years. The Commission is independent and non-partisan.

The most recent review was completed in December 2018, with new boundaries in effect for the 42nd provincial general election. Elections Manitoba provided administrative, communications and GIS support to the review process.

As part of the review process, the Commission makes public presentations on the proposed boundary changes. In total, 13 public hearings were held in 12 Manitoba communities.

Once the final report was complete, Elections Manitoba carried out the work of implementing the new boundaries. This included creating new maps for each of the 57 electoral divisions, assigning voting areas and voting places within each electoral division, and updating computer applications with new electoral divisions.

Environment

Elections Manitoba must always be prepared to conduct elections, byelections and referendums. The organization operates in a complex environment largely due to the uncertainty of election timing and continuous legislative change.

Between the 2016 and 2019 general elections, there were significant changes made to election law. The most notable was the requirement for Elections Manitoba to create a permanent voter register. This required Elections Manitoba to develop many new processes, materials and training resources.

Additional legislation changes have recently come into effect for the upcoming general election, set for October 2023. The changes are based on Elections Manitoba's recommendations to modernize the electoral process, incorporating technology to improve efficiency and voter service. A key change will be the use of vote counting machines, or tabulators, to replace the process of manual counting currently in use. Another process that will be automated is striking off the voter's name from the voters list. Instead of voting officers striking a name off a paper list with pencil, staff will strike names off a centralized electronic voters list. This will update the voters list system-wide, increasing efficiency and speeding up the process.

Although there is a set election date, a general election may be called at any time, and Elections Manitoba must always be ready. When a vacancy occurs within an election division, a byelection must be held to fill the vacancy within six months.

A large number of staff are required to complete election activities in a very short time frame. Most of the 7,000 staff required to run elections are recruited to work for a very short period of time. Of this number, approximately 6,000 work for a single day, either as voting officers, information officers or registration officers. The preliminary, revised and final voters lists must be completed by specific dates set by law. Elections Manitoba may not accept candidate nominations after the deadline. They must be reviewed by the end of the day that nominations close, so that ballots can be printed in time for advance voting.

Another key challenge in an election is space: Locations must be found in each of the 57 electoral divisions for a returning office. Over 900 voting locations are needed for election day and advance voting. Voting locations must be supplied with materials to allow all registered voters to cast a ballot. For the 42nd general election, 870,000 ballots were printed.

Finally, there is an ongoing potential need for Elections Manitoba to conduct referendums as required under various laws.

Elections Manitoba Strategic Priorities

In the strategic planning for the 43rd general election, Elections Manitoba confirmed its strategic priorities and supporting actions to guide election preparation:

Legislation

- Implement legislative changes
- Recommend legislative changes to improve administrative practices
- Assist political participants and others to comply with legislation
- Monitor overall compliance with legislation

Service

- Provide accessible voting opportunities to Manitobans
- Leverage technology to enhance service delivery
- Manage resources efficiently

- Maintain effective budget controls and reporting
- Provide assistance and training to stakeholders
- Provide ongoing training and resources to staff

Accessibility

- Fulfill the legislated responsibilities within *The Elections Act* and *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* to identify, remove and prevent barriers faced by persons with disabilities.
- Build on activities and plans to make voting accessible to all Manitobans.



Innovation

- Review, assess and change organizational practices, where feasible, to deliver services effectively and efficiently
- Leverage technology to streamline organizational work
- Seek out new ways to improve performance

Engagement

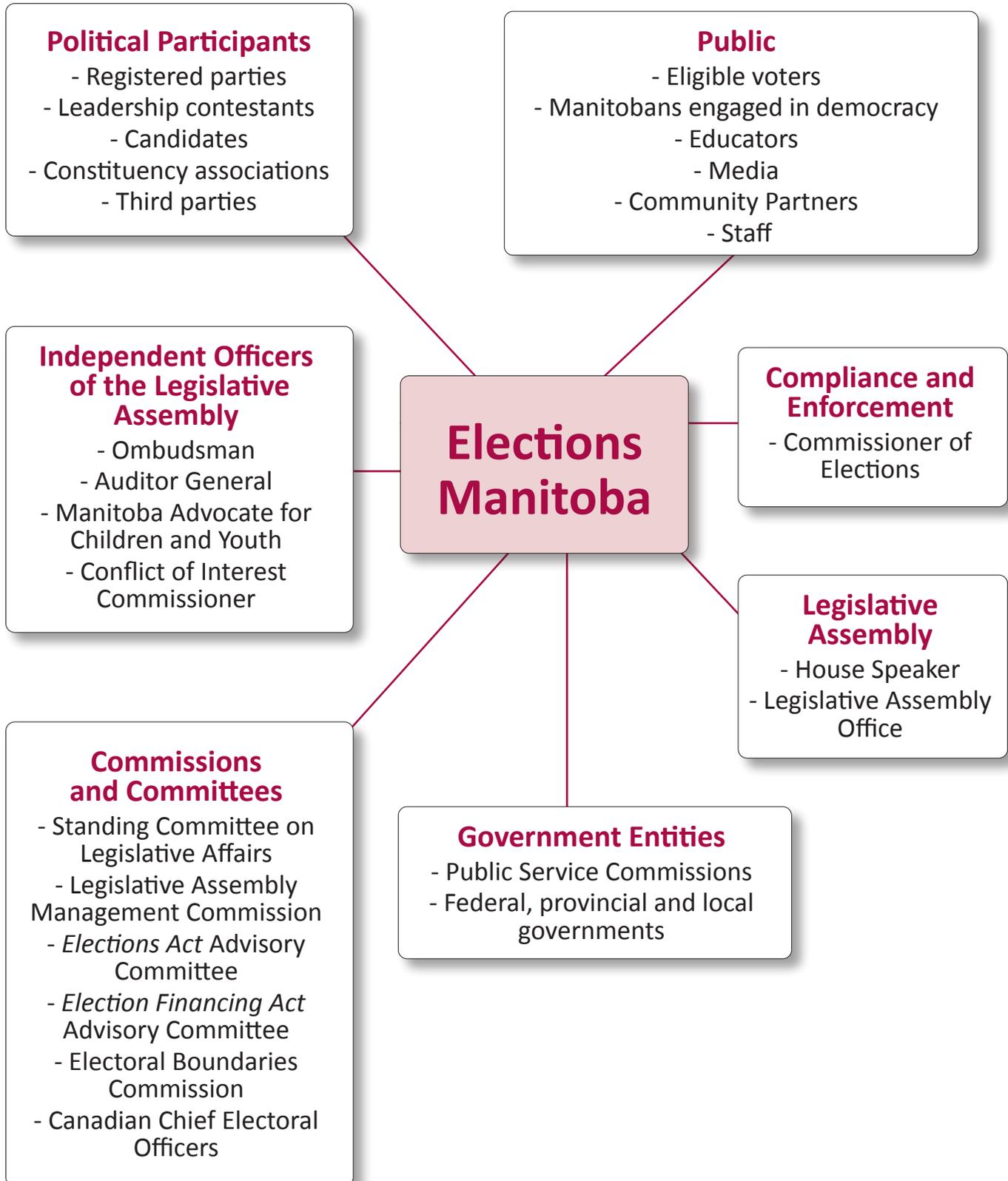
- Maintain and strengthen existing partnerships with organizations, vendors and other stakeholders
- Continue to reach out to existing and future stakeholders, including youth and those disconnected from the voting process
- Identify new approaches to establishing partnerships and conduct effective outreach to support democratic practices.

Part II. Programs and Services of Elections Manitoba

- Conduct elections and byelections
- Maintain the Manitoba Voter Register
- Conduct referendums
- Education program
- Community outreach program
- Post-secondary outreach program
- Registration of political participants
- Financial compliance assistance
- Reviewing political participants' annual and election financial returns
- Disclosure of political participants' financial activity



Part III. Stakeholders/Clients



Our primary stakeholders are eligible Manitoba voters. As per *The Elections Act*, this group includes all Manitobans who are:

- 18 years of age or older
- Canadian citizens
- Residents of Manitoba for six months immediately before election day

Based on estimate from 2019, there were 915,443 eligible voters at the time of the general election. This is by far the largest stakeholder group of Elections Manitoba.

With eligible voters making up almost 70% of Manitoba's population, it is likely that our stakeholder group has the same proportion of people with disabilities as the overall population.



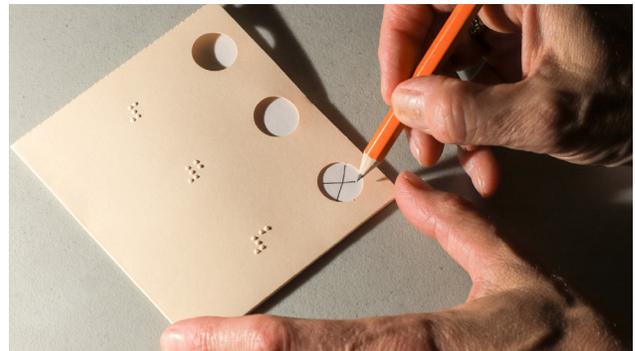
Part IV. Achievements to date

Legislation:

Current election law eliminates many potential barriers to participation. Returning offices and voting places must be accessible. With a variety of voting options, including homebound and institutional, Elections Manitoba can meet the needs of almost every eligible voter.

The following are specific accessibility provisions in the EA and the EFA:

- **Voting places must be accessible to people with physical disabilities.** This includes election day voting places and advance voting places. Because each returning office is also a voting place, the office itself must be accessible. (EA sec. 103(3), 125(6)).
- **Voting with a Braille ballot template:** Elections Manitoba prints Braille ballot templates and Braille lists of candidates for all voting places. This allows people who are blind to vote with a regular ballot and without assistance. (EA sec. 118(1) and (2)).
- **Voter requiring assistance:** A voter may bring someone with them to help them mark the ballot. The person must be at least 18 years old and must take an oath. Alternately, the voting officer may help the voter. (EA sec. 119(1))
- **Moving ballot box:** If a voter can't enter a voting station because of a disability, the voting officer can bring the ballot box outside to them. (EA sec. 121(1)).
- **Homebound voting:** If a voter can't leave his or her home because of a disability, he or she can apply to vote at home. The voter's caregiver may also vote this way. A voting officer brings the ballot to the voter's home and then returns the ballot in an unmarked envelope to the returning office. The voting package can also be mailed to the voter and then mailed back. (EA sec. 151(1-3))



- **Separate voting area for multiple residence of fewer than 100 units:** The returning officer may set up a separate voting area for an apartment, condominium or other multiple residence with fewer than 100 units, where the majority of residents are seniors or persons with disabilities. This allows the residents to vote without leaving the building. (EA sec. 64 (5.1))
- **Institutional voting:** The returning officer must set up voting stations for patients and residents of health care facilities. (EA sec. 137(1))
- **Co-located facilities:** A returning officer may extend an institutional voting station in a health care facility to include an adjoining facility or residence where seniors or persons with disabilities live. (EA sec. 137(1.1))
- **Candidates with a disability:**
 - Any reasonable disability-related expenses incurred by a candidate to allow him or her to campaign in an election are not considered election expenses. In other words, they are not counted towards the candidate's election spending limit. (EFA sec. 50 (3.6))
 - Candidates are reimbursed for all reasonable disability-related expenses incurred during an election period, as long as the candidate receives 5% or more of the valid votes in his or her electoral division. The expenses must be over and above any expenses he or she would normally incur. (EFA sec. 74 (2))
- **Plain language:**
 - *The Elections Act* was re-written in plain language in 2008
 - *The Election Financing Act* was re-organized and re-written in plain language in 2013

Policies/Practices of Elections Manitoba arising from the legislation or developed to enhance accessibility

Voting

- **Accessibility checklist:** As part of their election preparation, all returning officers must complete an accessibility checklist for every voting place in their electoral division. For the 2019 general election, only two voting places out of 900 did not fully meet the accessibility requirements.¹

¹ In one case, the doorway closest to the voting stations didn't meet standards. In the other, staff needed to assist voters using the elevator and on two occasions, the staff were not in the immediate area.

- In addition to the Braille ballot templates, Elections Manitoba provides large print lists of candidates to voters with low vision.
- Elections Manitoba arranges for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters to assist voters with registration and voting. This service is provided at no cost to the voter.
- Easy-grip pencils are available at all voting stations.
- A writing pad is available at all voting stations to assist with communication.
- The font on write-in ballots has been enlarged and changed to make them easier to read.
- Voters may bring service animals with them into the voting place.
- Designated parking available for voters with disabilities

Communications

NEW

Elections Manitoba has created a series of four accessible videos showing viewers how to vote, how to register, steps to consider when planning to vote, and how to apply for jobs with Elections Manitoba.

There are two versions of each video, one in English with English closed captioning and American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, and the other in French with French closed captioning and Langue Signe du Québec (LSQ) interpretation. The videos are also scripted in plain language with strong visuals to further ensure clarity.

In developing the videos, Elections Manitoba consulted with the E-Quality Communications Centre for Excellence (ECCOE), who also provided ASL interpreters.

- Question & Answer Book prepared for election period includes sections on accessibility options for voters. This book is used by all headquarters and returning office staff to easily access information on specific topics.
- Elections Manitoba website includes information on accessibility options for voters.
- Print advertising during an election includes information about the homebound voting option. The information is also publicized in our media relations campaign, through social media and in the Voter's Guide, which is distributed at various locations throughout the province.
- Elections Manitoba is reviewing all existing public materials to ensure they are in plain language. Any new documents created for the public will be written in plain language.
- Elections Manitoba regularly consults with Accessibility Manitoba on accessibility information and practices.

NEW

Voters are allowed to use their mobile devices to assist them with voting, e.g. if they have an application on their device that helps them read the ballot. (EA sec. 119(1))

- Print advertising during an election includes information about the homebound voting option. The information is also publicized in our media relations campaign, through social media and in the Voter's Guide, which is distributed at various locations throughout the province.
- Elections Manitoba is reviewing all existing public materials to ensure they are in plain language. Any new documents created for the public will be written in plain language.
- Elections Manitoba regularly consults with Accessibility Manitoba on accessibility information and practices.

Recruitment and Training

- Returning officer training includes a section on assisting voters with a disability. The section provides advice on how best to assist voters with specific types of disabilities, while emphasizing respect and the need to safeguard the rights of all voters.
- Headquarters staff are required to complete accessible customer service training by viewing a series of videos developed by Manitoba Possible (formerly Society for Manitobans with Disabilities).
- Employment equity policy and procedure are in place for recruitment of returning officers and assistant returning officers.
- Elections Manitoba complies with the Government of Manitoba employment equity policy and procedure for recruitment of all permanent staff.



NEW

Push button door at public office entrance.

Part V. Accessibility consultation, May 31, 2017

Elections Manitoba hosted a consultation for disabilities organizations to share an early stage of this plan and seek their feedback. Participants were asked for their comments and ideas on three specific areas:

- Accessible customer service
- Accessible information and communications
- Accessible voting opportunities

Thank you to the following community agencies and individuals for your valuable input:

- Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre: Noella Gentes
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)/Vision Loss Rehabilitation Manitoba: Leonard Furber, Joanne Fabian, Cliff Diakiw
- Deaf Centre Manitoba: Sheila Montney, Doug Momotiuk
- Disabilities Issues Office: Colleen Watters
- E-Quality Communication Centre of Excellence: Shaina Dumont, Brenda Rutherford
- MNP: Jason Ducharme, Caroline Quinn
- Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society of Canada, Manitoba Division: Ken Schachtay
- Inclusion Winnipeg: Janet Forbes
- Society for Manitobans with Disabilities: Heather Hiscock

The consultation was a positive, open and constructive dialogue. Participants advised Elections Manitoba, in developing our plan, it is important to consider a wide range of disabilities resulting in unique needs. They also stressed the importance of increasing awareness of the many accessible voting opportunities available. Comments and observations can be grouped into several key themes or recommendations:

Increased and more effective training of frontline staff

Consultation participants said there was a need for front-line staff to have a better understanding of the types of accessibility barriers and the importance of respect, patience, listening and dignity. Suggestions included asking, “Do you need assistance with anything?” and then listening attentively to the response as an effective way to support voters with disabilities. They also stressed that it was important that staff be aware of the wide variety and range of disabilities, including less obvious disabilities, like “unseen”

cognitive disabilities, in addition to the more obvious physical disabilities. Participants also emphasized the importance of ensuring that customer service training is provided to election officials by individuals or organizations with expertise.

Better promotion and awareness of existing services

Many participants shared that they were not aware of the full range of services currently offered by Elections Manitoba to reduce barriers. They also suggested that disabilities organizations could be effective partners in spreading awareness of voting opportunities and services provided by Elections Manitoba. All participants expressed their willingness to help communicate to their own communities. They also offered to provide resources, research and additional feedback to Elections Manitoba on specific disabilities and how to reduce barriers.



Use of technology and other communication supports Participants shared information on existing technologies that could easily enhance the accessibility of elections, including video calling, texting and screen readers. We were made aware of a service developed by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), called Video Relay Service (VRS). This service allows people who use sign language to communicate with voice telephone users using Internet-based videoconferencing.

Others commented on the need to make many different options available for communication, noting, for example, that people with similar disabilities may not use the same communication methods. Many noted the importance of clear directional and informational signage at voting places. Signs should use a combination of text and pictures, and staff should be located at entry points and along the way to a voting place.

The responses and comments provided by participants have been carefully considered and many have been incorporated into this plan.

Part VI. Highlights of accomplishments since initial accessibility plan (2017):

2018-19

- Partnered with Society for Manitobans with Disabilities to make accessible customer service training videos available to all permanent and election staff.
 - Training has been provided to all permanent staff.
 - Training is now part of new employee orientation.
 - Training was provided to all returning officers, assistant returning officers and voting officials for the 2019 general election (over 8,000)
- Included closed captioning in television ad for 2019 general election
- Partnered with disabilities organization to provide information to Manitobans on voting options and services for voters with disabilities
- Developed new policies for accessible customer service, including a feedback process for customer concerns

2020

- Commissioned a post-election survey to gather feedback on the experience of voters with disabilities in the recent election. Survey was distributed through disabilities organizations. Unfortunately, distribution began just as the COVID-19 pandemic was starting to disrupt business, so the survey was not fully executed. A total of 79 responses were received, broken down as follows:
- Conducted an accessibility audit of Elections Manitoba's 43 most frequently visited web pages and ensured they complied with WCAG 2.1 - AA standard.
- Work on compliance with the Accessible Employment standard:
 - Provide individual emergency response information to keep employees with disabilities safe
 - Asked employees who require assistance during an emergency for permission to share information with individuals who have agreed to help.
 - Developed an accessible employment policy
 - Provided accessible employment training to management and staff with human resource responsibilities

Part VII. Outreach for the 2019 general election:

- Partnered with disability organizations to spread information to the different communities about accessibility services and voting options available during the election. Through this partnership, we distributed over 1,500 print copies as well as digital versions to 17 disabilities organizations in Manitoba.
- Partnered with Democratic Engagement Exchange, United Way Winnipeg and the City of Winnipeg to provide Vote PopUp training to community groups in Winnipeg. Aimed at reaching people who may face barriers to voting, Vote PopUp is a tool to increase community members' involvement in Canada's democracy and ensure that all voices are heard in the electoral process. Elections Manitoba provided support and materials to community organizations wanting to run their own Vote PopUps leading up to the provincial and federal elections.
- Partnered with E-Quality Communication Centre Of Excellence (ECCOE) to provide ASL interpretation service to voters at Deaf Centre Manitoba on election day.
- Partnered with Vision Impaired Resource Network (VIRN) to produce our brochure on accessibility services and voting options in Braille. Braille brochures were provided to every returning office.
- Participated in an election kick-off event hosted by Disability Matters: Hosted a booth to provide accessibility information for the election to event attendees.



Part VIII. Existing Barriers

Attitudinal

- Lack of knowledge/awareness among staff of range of barriers that exist and how to support accommodations
- Lack of knowledge/awareness among some staff about accessibility legislation and standards

Elections Manitoba has been addressing the knowledge gap through ongoing training and will continue to do so.

Information and communication

- Some forms and publications not easily available in multiple formats
- Some forms not written in plain language
- Not all staff aware of appropriate communication methods and accessible customer service practices for people with disabilities

Existing forms that are revised and new forms that are developed are written in plain language. Elections Manitoba's brochure with information on voting services and options for people with disabilities was available in multiple, including braille.

Technological

- Website is not accessible to all. Does not meet WCAG 2.0 standards for web accessibility.

A website accessibility audit is planned for 2020, with a plan to meet WCAG standards by the end of the year.

Systemic

- Elections Manitoba's operations are primarily event-based. This means that our services only come to public attention during an election. With every election, we must educate or re-educate the public on accessible voting options and services available. Given the large amount of information that Elections Manitoba must provide during an election, it is challenging to make our accessibility message stand out.

Ongoing partnership with disabilities organizations to communicate this information is one of the ways we are addressing this challenge.

Physical and architectural

- Not every voting location is fully accessible. Elections Manitoba must balance physical accessibility with convenience. In smaller communities, the most central and/or convenient location may not have complete accessibility. There can also be a challenge in finding accessible locations available to rent on a short-term basis. The uncertainty of the election date for the most recent election made the situation still more challenging.

Other voting options can offset gaps in physical accessibility of voting places. For example, curbside voting, homebound voting and absentee voting do not require voters to enter a voting place.

Part IX. Priority Areas

Attitudinal

- a. Ensure that all voters are able to participate in the democratic process in a manner that is fair and respectful.
- b. Ensure staff understand all options and services available to voters with a disability
- c. Ensure staff understand different types of barriers and how to offer accommodations, within existing election law
- d. Ensure staff know how to communicate respectfully and help people with disabilities
- e. Ensure staff are trained to provide service in a manner that is fair and respectful to people with disabilities.
- f. Ensure policies are in place to support the above priorities
- g. Ensure all policies and training are documented
- h. Ensure awareness of and compliance with standards as they come into effect.

Part X. Policies

Elections Manitoba follows many of the same policies developed by the Civil Service Commission that are used throughout the Manitoba Government. These include:

- Manitoba Policy on Access to Government Publications, Events and Services
- Reasonable Accommodation Policy
- Employment Equity Policy

Elections Manitoba's mandate is to ensure free, fair and accessible elections so all eligible voters in Manitoba have the opportunity to cast their ballot. The legislative framework for the operations of Elections Manitoba comes from three key pieces of legislation: *The Elections Act (EA)*, *The Election Financing Act (EFA)* and *The Referendum Act*. Other pieces of legislation that ensure accessibility to elections in Manitoba include:

- The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees that every eligible voter has the right to vote.
- The *Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA)* states that people should have barrier-free access to place and events that are generally available in the community. It also states that people with disabilities should have barrier-free access to those things that will give them equality of opportunity and outcome.

Many policies, practices and measures already in place at Elections Manitoba respond to the requirements outlined in the customer service standard. Elections Manitoba developed an accessible customer service policy that was in effect for the 2019 general election. The policy addresses voting opportunities, interactions with voters and general communications with voters.

1) Communications: Communication with persons with disabilities must be done in a manner that takes barriers into account:

- Advertising and other informational materials are produced in a variety of formats. Materials incorporate the principles of plain language use and clear design.
- Election information is provided to the public through a variety of media, e.g. print, radio, television, online, etc.
- Voters may request ASL interpretation to register to vote and to cast a ballot.
- Elections Manitoba promotes accessible voting opportunities in its advertising and communications campaigns as well as in partnership with disabilities organizations.

- Elections Manitoba makes reasonable efforts to ensure that, when communicating with a person who self-identifies as being disabled by a barrier, that the communication is done in a manner that takes into account the barrier.
- 2) Assistive Devices:** Voters may use assistive devices and other supports, including personal mobile devices, inside voting places and behind the voting screen. They may also use their devices at any other location where Elections Manitoba business is conducted, where permitted by law. Voters are advised that care should be taken keep their vote secret, as per sec. 123(1) of the EA.
 - 3) Support persons:** Voters who come with a support person may have that support person come with them behind the voting screen. The support person must sign an oath. This is guaranteed under s. 119 of the EA.
 - 4) Service animals:** Voters who use service animals are allowed to bring their service animal into voting places and behind the voting screen and at any other location where Elections Manitoba business is conducted.
 - 5) Built environment:** Voting places must be accessible with clear and unobstructed hallways and accessible features, such as automatic entrances, doors and ramps, where available. Ramps may be supplied by Elections Manitoba to eliminate a potential barrier in a voting place.
 - 6) Feedback process:** The public may give feedback to Elections Manitoba on accessible customer service through a variety of methods: in person, by phone or email. Feedback provided to a returning office will be forwarded to headquarters by returning office staff. An initial response is provided within one week, with any follow-up provided within a reasonable period of time. Any resulting actions are documented.
 - 7) Information about accessible customer service policies, processes and practices:** Returning offices and voting places will display information about accessible voting opportunities and options. Information at these locations will direct members of the public to the Elections Manitoba website for information on customer service policies, processes and practices.

- 8) Training:** Elections Manitoba provides accessible customer service training to election officials, returning office staff and permanent staff. Election officials receive training before taking on their responsibilities and returning office and permanent staff receive training within a reasonable time of taking on their responsibilities with Elections Manitoba.
- 9) Public events:** Any public event held by Elections Manitoba is to be accessible by ensuring the following:
- Notice of the event is to be provided in a manner that is accessible to persons with disabilities.
 - Events are to be held in a location that is accessible, or where this is not possible, other methods must be in place to ensure participation.
 - Reasonable accommodation will be provided on request for those wishing to participate.
 - Notice will be given that people with disabilities may request supports or accommodation

Part XI. Identifying Initiatives and Actions

Actions mentioned in earlier plans that have been executed and completed are not mentioned below. The ongoing actions mentioned below are the initiatives that continue to be monitored.

1) Initiative/Action

Continue to provide training to all HQ staff on the *Accessibility for Manitobans Act*, including customer service standard, employment standard and other standards as they come into effect.

Expected Outcome

Ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities under the AMA.

2) Initiative/Action

Review and ensure understanding of the information and communication standard to plan for any required compliance activities.

Expected Outcome

Ensure timely compliance with standard and that affected staff are aware of any related responsibilities.

3) Initiative/Action

Continue to document processes that ensure voting is accessible and make those processes available to the public in plain language.

Expected Outcome

Increased public awareness of accessibility measures in place to facilitate voting for people with disabilities.

4) Initiative/Action

Review voting place accessibility checklist to ensure criteria are up to date. Continue to seek feedback from disabilities organizations on the criteria.

Expected Outcome

Remaining current with evolving accessibility needs of the public to ensure best possible accessibility to voting.

² This survey was discontinued before completion due to COVID-19 pandemic. Could investigate conducting it following 43rd GE.

5) Initiative/Action

With the assistance of Manitoba disabilities organizations, develop and conduct a post-election survey of their clients' experience during the election.²

Expected Outcome

Better understanding of needs and experiences of voters with disabilities.

6) Initiative/Action

Investigate the possibility of offering a live chat option during the election period as an additional method to provide feedback and ask questions about the election

Expected Outcome

Additional method of customer feedback

7) Initiative/Action

Following a general election, review customer service feedback received to inform future planning for prevention and removal of barriers

Expected Outcome

Effective use of resources to prevent and remove barriers for greatest customer service impact.

8) Initiative/Action

Continue to do targeted registration at homeless shelters

Expected Outcome

Reduction of barriers to voting

9) Initiative/Action

Ensure WCAG compliance for voting opportunities sections of the Elections Manitoba website

Expected Outcome

Better user experience for people with disabilities; better access to information for voters with disabilities

10. Initiative/Action

Ensure deliverables for employment standard are completed on schedule:

- a. Emergency response planning
- b. Reasonable accommodation measures, policies and practices

Expected Outcome

- A safer work environment for employees with disabilities.
- A more inclusive workplace that is responsive to the specific needs of employees with disabilities

11) Initiative/Action

Ensure corporate staff are aware of any new obligations and progress made on accessibility measures.

Expected Outcome

Better organization-wide awareness of accessibility progress and responsibilities

12) Initiative/Action

Ensure continuity/knowledge transfer on accessibility file

Expected Outcome

Minimal gap in accessibility initiatives on accessibility activities

13) Initiative/Action

Keep training document up-to-date to ensure all accessibility training is properly tracked

Expected Outcome

Continued compliance with standards

14) Initiative/Action

Ensure affected staff are aware and knowledgeable of any/all accessibility policies, including customer service and employment

Expected Outcome

Continued compliance with standards