

INITIATIVES USED IN CALGARY AND OTHER JURISDICTIONS

1.0 Calgary Initiatives

One of the duties of the Returning Officer in conducting an election is to try to minimize elector barriers to voting. The City of Calgary has implemented many procedures that go above and beyond the legislated requirements in an attempt to achieve this result, including:

- An average of seven advance vote days
- Electors can vote at the advance vote location of their choice
- Advance vote locations include SAIT, University of Calgary and Mount Royal University
- Mobile vote bus locations for advance vote that includes early hour voting
- “Where Do I Vote” applications on calgary.ca and for all smart phone operating systems
- Incapacitated voting at home can be requested up until 4 p.m. on election day (not done in Edmonton)
- Bed-to-bed voting option in hospitals (Edmonton does not go to elector’s bedside)
- Mail-in (Special) Ballot available and can be requested beginning July 1 through to 8 p.m. on election day
- All voting locations are handicap accessible
- Advertising in the local Chinese language newspaper
- Instructions to Elector and Statement of Elector are translated into nineteen languages and are available at all voting stations (Edmonton provides no translation at voting stations)
- Election information on website and applications such as request for Incapacitated or Mail-in (Special) Ballot voting and proximity of advance vote locations
- Blind voter templates available at advance vote locations

2.0 Initiatives in Other Jurisdictions

A breakdown of some initiatives used by other jurisdictions trying to increase voter turnout is provided below. It should be noted that unless otherwise noted, there is no conclusive evidence that these initiatives helped raise voter turnout.

2.1 Internet Voting

Internet voting at the local level in Canada has been concentrated in Ontario and Nova Scotia. It has not been found to increase turnout and does not necessarily reduce costs.

The Internet Voting Project, a partnership between the University of Toronto and the Centre for e-Democracy, collected attitudinal data from election stakeholders in 47 Ontario municipalities that used internet voting for the 2014 general election. The study concludes that:

- Internet voting is not a panacea for turnout decline or engaging non-voters.

- There is a modest potential for internet voting to encourage people who do not vote for “everyday life” reasons (e.g. too busy, out of town, etc) to vote but it does not bring in non-voters who are apathetic, not interested, indifferent about candidates, etc.
- The average internet voter is 53 years old and married, has a higher income and some university education or above and is already a habitual voter who declares themselves to have a moderate to high level of interest in politics.

Research released by Elections BC in 2011 and Elections Canada in 2010 also concludes that internet voting does not necessarily result in higher voter turnout.

2.2 All-Mail Elections

The states of Oregon and Washington are two jurisdictions where elections are held using voting by mail (VBM) – a system where voters automatically receive their ballots by mail and return them by a variety of methods. In Oregon, VBM was adopted for all elections starting in November 1998. Studies of VBM elections in Oregon have come up with the following:

- A 2000 study reported that the VBM system increased voter turnout in Oregon by 10%.
- Subsequent studies have argued that the 10 percentage point finding was a consequence of a novelty effect of the first three VBM contests and was not a long-term effect of the voting system.
- Other academic studies of VBM show a significant but small (2% to 4%) bump in turnout.
- Most studies make a nuanced claim: that VBM stabilizes turnout by retaining wavering, infrequent voters but does not bring new voters into the system.
- Administrators have reported that the turnout increases for races that are not usually as popular such as school board elections.

2.3 Getting Into Schools

It is essential that young adults vote the first time they are able to do so. Studies have shown that a person who votes the first time they are able to is more likely to become a habitual voter. Numerous jurisdictions have shifted their attention to working in schools to teach students about the electoral process and why it is important to vote. While there is a lot of positive feedback that comes with this type of activity, there is no solid evidence that voter turnout is increased as a result. Examples of initiatives include:

- Mock elections held in schools at the same time as a general election. For example, CIVIX, a non-governmental organization, coordinated a Student Vote program for the 2015 Alberta provincial election with support from Elections Alberta and other governmental organizations. Students in elementary and high school held debates, organized the voting process and cast nearly 100,000 ballots.
- Providing resources about elections to be used in classrooms. For example, Elections Canada, Elections Alberta and Elections Ontario have created lessons about voting that

teachers can use in their classrooms. Elections Ontario also works with school boards to distribute targeted information to students who are or will soon be eighteen years old.

2.4 Incentive-Based Initiatives

A few jurisdictions have attempted to use incentive-based initiatives. Such proposals may engage a fierce debate about what is and is not acceptable in promoting democratic participation. Examples of inducements include:

- In 2006, voters in the state of Arizona voted on a proposal to award 1 million dollars (USD) to a randomly-selected voter after each primary and general election held in the state. The proposal was defeated.
- For the 1995 municipal election in Norway, a local jurisdiction held a lottery where a randomly-selected voter received travel vouchers to a destination in the warm south. Voter turnout increased by nearly 10% but it is difficult to ascertain if it was the lottery that caused the hike or other system changes introduced for that election. The lottery was not hosted again.
- An election lottery was held for the 2005 parliamentary elections in Bulgaria. Prizes included a car, computer equipment, electronic appliances and mobile phones. This lottery was widely perceived as subtle electoral campaigning in favour of one party. Overall, this incentive failed to induce more people to vote; the lowest turnout for sixteen years was recorded.

2.5 Creation of Positive Cues

These incentives were implemented based on research that argues that some people are highly motivated by visual cues. There is no conclusive evidence that these incentives result in a higher voter turnout.

- Recruitment of local celebrities and media to give positive cues about voting.
- Distribution of “I voted, did you?” stickers to voters as they leave the voting station. This was again to create positive cues, a reminder for others to vote and leverages social networks.
- Holding a party in an area near a voting station. This initiative is normally targeted at voting stations at post-secondary institutions and aims to draw electors in and create a sense of community.
- Having young people talk to other young people about voting in an attempt to make voting “cool.” This includes bringing information to where youth already are (e.g. music festivals, skateboard parks, etc.).

2.6 Other Initiatives

- In Ohio, park benches were given addresses and homeless persons were allowed to list these addresses as their residence. These persons were not required to show identification if they swore to being homeless. There has been no study to determine if this change has increased voter turnout amongst the homeless population.
- Most jurisdictions host information campaigns that focus on the “how, when and where” of voting during an election year. Due to resource constraints, educational activity during non-election years is rarer. An exception is the Electoral Commission of New Zealand which focuses substantial non-election year resources on giving presentations and publications to interested parties such as teachers, journalists and community groups to strengthen the capacity of these groups to spread the message on electoral processes. It is not known if these non-election year activities have resulted in a higher voter turnout.
- In 2010, the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary and Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary conducted a project called Every Vote Counts. Surveys and forums were held where members of the immigrant community discussed their experiences with municipal elections and their views for improving voter turnout. As a result of this project, many of the participants were more confident in voting as they felt more engaged in their community, had a better understanding of the electoral process and heard from candidates at a Mayoral Town Hall. It is not known if this initiative did in fact increase the voter turnout amongst Calgary’s immigrant population.