

Voting Initiatives in Calgary and other Jurisdictions

1.0 Calgary initiatives

The role of the Returning Officer is to reduce barriers to voting and ensure fair voting procedures are in place. In pursuit of this mandate, the following were previously implemented for City of Calgary general elections or have been expanded:

- 7 advance vote dates
- Electors can vote at any of the **30 advance vote locations**
- Advance vote locations at post-secondary education institutions
- Expanded Advance vote bus locations
- “Where Do I Vote” application
- **Advance Vote brochure** mailed out to every household
- **Election brochure** mailed to every Calgary residence
- Incapacitated, hospital and mail-in voting options available
- Increased advertising and voter engagement
- All voting locations are barrier-free
- New convenient voting station locations (e.g. Southcentre Mall, Libraries, Leisure Centres)
- Advertising in ethnic minority newspapers and media
- Voting instructions translated into eighteen languages available at all voting stations
- Blind voter templates available at advance vote locations
- Candidate profile pages

In addition to the strategies that Calgary has implemented, legislation allows electors to complete a voter registration card on Election Day, a critical factor in supporting voter turnout.

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 elections at the local level in Canada have been concentrated in Ontario and Nova Scotia. Alberta legislation currently does not allow for internet based elections. In Nova Scotia about one-third of communities have used internet ballots, while in Ontario about one-quarter of the municipalities used internet ballots in October 2014, comprising one-fifth of the provincial electorate. The purpose of this analysis is not to explore the methods of or concerns/benefits that come with internet voting but to discuss voter turnout as it relates to internet voting. For thorough discussions on internet voting see Elections BC 2011, Goodman 2012 and Goodman et al. 2010.

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 October 2014 general election. The study analyzes numerous factors about internet voting, including the impact it has on turnout and its potential to encourage non-voters to participate electorally. 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.
- Convenience is the number one reason cited for using internet voting and 95% of persons who responded to the internet voter survey said they had strong satisfaction with the process.
- Research released by Elections BC in 2011 and Goodman et al. for 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 receive and return their ballots by mail. 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 by Southwell and Burchett reported that the VBM system increased voter turnout in Oregon by 10%.
- Subsequent studies have argued that the 10 percentage point finding by Southwell and Burchett 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.

2.3 Getting into schools

- Mock elections are held in schools at the same time as the general election. Students are responsible for running the election and voting. These have been run by both

governmental and non-governmental organizations alike and are aimed at getting voters to vote the first time they are eligible.

- Providing resources and online forums about elections to be used in classrooms.

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 social science research that reveals that some people are highly motivated by visual cues.

- 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 creates 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

- Allowing homeless people to describe the location of a park or bench where they frequently return as determination of address. These persons are not required to show identification if they swear to being homeless.
- Extensive information and advertising campaigns that run in both election and non-election years.
- In 2010, the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary (ECCC) 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 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.

As a means to increase voter turnout in the immigrant community, participants made several recommendations:

1. Members of the ethno-cultural communities continue, or increase, civic involvement.
2. The municipality spread awareness of the election process in multiple languages.
3. Ethnic and mainstream media take responsibility for educating voters in diverse formats.
4. Elected officials continue, or increase, efforts to engage ethno-cultural communities.
5. The community as a whole work toward eliminating barriers to civic participation, such as lack of affordable childcare and transportation

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