

Policy on Standard In-Person Voting Services

Last updated: February 13, 2024

1. Effective date

This policy was approved by the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) on February 13, 2024, and takes effect on March 15, 2024.

2. Purpose

The *Canada Elections Act* (the Act) gives the CEO the authority to exercise general direction and supervision over the conduct of federal elections, including the administration of voting services to electors and provides that the CEO is to exercise the powers and perform the duties and functions that are necessary for the administration of the Act. The CEO does so in alignment with the principles of electoral integrity articulated in the [Electoral Integrity Framework](#): accessibility, fairness, independence, reliability, security, and transparency.

Returning Officers (ROs) are responsible, within their electoral district, for ensuring that the requirements of the Act and instructions, issued by the CEO, are implemented in a manner as to allow electors to exercise their right to vote during a federal election.

The purpose of this policy is to guide the interpretation and operationalization of the Act in offering standard in-person voting services, as described below. It aims to articulate a transparent explanation of Elections Canada's approach to offering standard in-person voting services.

The principles outlined in this policy guide the *Directive on Accessibility Exemptions when Selecting a Suitable Polling Place*, *Directive on Establishing Advance Polls in Remote Communities*, *Directive on the Assigned Voting Desk Service Model* and *Directive on the Vote-at-Any-Desk Service Model*.

3. Application

Elections Canada offers various voting opportunities which include standard in-person voting services, extended in-person voting services, and the opportunity to vote by mail or otherwise by special ballot. This policy applies to standard in-person voting services which are defined as those prescribed in the Act for select voting locations and hours. These voting services are provided at advance polls, ordinary polls, as well as at ROs and additional assistant returning officers (AAROs) offices.

4. Objective

Elections Canada administers standard in-person voting services, as required in the Act and according to the principles of electoral integrity, in a way that allows electors, political entities, and the general public to understand the context in which decisions are made when offering voting services in person.

This policy explains how Elections Canada establishes a balance between competing considerations in administering standard in-person voting services, in accordance with the [Electoral Integrity Framework](#). These considerations, include legal requirements and operational constraints, which impact the delivery of in-person voting services and are explained further in the directives under this policy.

5. Context

Elections Canada is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament. Its mission is to ensure that Canadians can exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate. Elections Canada must always be prepared to conduct a federal election in compliance with the *Canada Elections Act*.

CEO discretion

While the Act clearly sets out requirements regarding Elections Canada's administration of voting services, it also gives authority to the CEO to exercise discretion in providing these services to electors. This discretion, as well as the ability to issue instructions to election officers, ensure in-person services at polling places and RO/AARO offices. These instructions provide requirements and guidance for the ROs to follow in performing their duties and, resolving competing considerations and challenges when establishing standard in-person voting services. These instructions are aligned with the [Electoral Integrity Framework](#), this policy, and its associated directives, especially where they relate to matters not prescribed in the Act.

The role of Returning Officers

For the purpose of this policy, and as part of their mandate, of conducting an election in an electoral district (ED), ROs are required to take the steps to ensure electors are provided with standard in-person voting services. ROs, guided by the CEO's instructions and with support from Elections Canada headquarters, select suitable polling places within their communities and hire election officers to ensure that electors are able to exercise their right to vote.

While fulfilling their mandate, ROs are also regularly faced with unique local challenges and operational constraints which may lead to competing considerations and calls for flexibility. Some recurring logistical challenges faced by ROs in past general elections have included the unavailability of suitable and accessible polling places for ordinary and advance polls, as well as challenges related to the recruitment, training, and retention of election officers. Other considerations include potential challenges to voting faced by electors across their ED and the relatively short timeline of the electoral cycle within which all voting services must be established and delivered.

ROs lead the management of challenges by effectively allocating their finite resources and leveraging their local knowledge and network, with support from Elections Canada headquarters, to provide a consistent delivery of in-person voting services to electors across all EDs.

6. Policy statement and guiding principles

Consistent with its mandate under the Act and in alignment with the [Electoral Integrity Framework](#), Elections Canada upholds electoral integrity and contributes to preserving trust in the electoral process by administering all voting services in an accessible, fair, independent, reliable, secure, and transparent manner. Elections Canada strives to strike a balance between these six principles which together guide its provision of voting services.

The relevancy of each principle depends on the context of a situation. In certain situations, one of these principles may be more relevant, while in others, multiple principles may be. Specific examples and descriptions of how the principles are applied and balanced against one another are provided in the directives associated with this policy. The following statements explain the principles that guide the *Policy on Standard In-Person Voting Services* and the directives associated with it:

6.1 Accessibility

Elections Canada provides reliable information about when, where, and how to vote at advance polls, on election day, at the RO office and the AARO office.

Elections Canada seeks to remove undue barriers, to the extent possible, at advance and ordinary polling places and at the RO and AARO offices, to ensure electors can safely vote with dignity and independence.

Elections Canada aims to provide inclusive standard in-person voting services to all Canadians in order to exercise their right to vote.

6.2 Fairness

Elections Canada provides voting services, at advance, ordinary polls, at the RO office and the AARO office, in an impartial and fair manner.

Candidates are equitably provided information concerning the dates and locations of standard in-person voting services.

Candidates are informed of their rights and the rights of their representatives to observe the voting process and the count. Those rights are administered equitably.

6.3 Independence

Elections Canada administers standard in-person voting services in a manner that is independent from the government, political entities, and other partisan influence.

6.4 Reliability

Elections Canada provides instructions to election officers to ensure that standard in-person voting services are administered in a predictable and consistent manner in accordance with the Act.

Elections Canada adheres to the sound management of human, financial, and material resources to deliver standard in-person voting services effectively and efficiently.

Elections Canada considers local ED-level factors when administering standard in-person voting services.

Elections Canada proactively seeks and considers feedback from electors and political participants to improve standard in-person voting services.

6.5 Security

Elections Canada administers standard in-person voting services in a manner that maintains the secrecy of the vote.

Elections Canada ensures there are safeguards to prevent, detect, and mitigate threats to the security of standard in-person voting services.

6.6 Transparency

Elections Canada administers voting services in a manner that is observable, for candidates and their representatives, and features oversight.

7. Roles and responsibilities

For all roles and responsibilities related to Elections Canada's regulatory policy instruments, please refer to *Regulatory Policy Development and Management*.

8. Monitoring, evaluation and review

This policy will be reviewed and updated upon the request of the CEO, who may be advised in this regard by the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer - Electoral Events and Innovation and/or the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer – Regulatory Affairs. A proactive evaluation of all policy instruments will also be conducted following all general elections, so that operational changes can be reflected in the relevant instruments.

9. Inquiries

Address any questions about this policy to: politiqueregulatoire-regulatorypolicy@elections.ca.