Elections Canada

Advisory Committee of Political Parties

Meeting Summary

Annual General Meeting

June 19 and 20, 2017

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Meeting Summary

The objective of the Annual General Meeting of June 19 and 20, 2017, was to update the Committee on the activities that Elections Canada (EC) has conducted since the last general meeting. EC also provided an overview of organizational priorities related to the modernization of services for electors and political entities.

This summary follows the order of the Agenda included in Appendix A. A list of the participants is included in Appendix B.

Introductory Remarks by the Acting Chief Electoral Officer

Stéphane Perrault, Acting Chief Electoral Officer (A/CEO), welcomed members of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties (ACPP) to the 2017 Annual General Meeting (AGM).
Mr. Perrault also updated the Committee on the agency's activities since the 2016 AGM and went over some planning assumptions, expectations and timelines with regard to forthcoming legislation.

Since Marc Mayrand's retirement in December 2016, Mr. Perrault has held the authority to exercise all of the responsibility and duties of the office. Additionally, the agency has been reorganized into three sectors: Electoral Events and Innovation (led by Michel Roussel), Regulatory and Public Affairs (led by Stéphane Perrault) and Internal Services (led by Hughes St-Pierre).

Electoral Services Modernization

Michel Roussel, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events and Innovation, provided an update on four key areas where EC aims to improve electoral services:

1. **Urban voting centres:** A new voting model that uses on-site information management systems and electronic poll books would reduce wait times.

2. **Remote communities:** Additional advance voting options would improve services in remote and sparsely populated areas where distance to the polling place is a concern.

3. **Electors voting outside their electoral district:** Electors who cannot or do not want to vote at their designated polling places would benefit from more special ballot voting opportunities (e.g. campus-based voting).

4. **Online services for political entities:** Political entities would access all electoral services and tools from a web portal.

Mr. Roussel also reminded the Committee that there are two critical requirements to implementing many of the service enhancements. First, there are amendments to the *Canada Elections Act*, which would give the CEO more flexibility in how the polling places operate. Secondly, the technology needed to support more efficient operations must be proven available, reliable, usable and secure. The agency will take a cautious and incremental approach to introduce only proven technology in the administration of the electoral process and will require vendors to adhere to rigorous federal government security and privacy standards. In support of this, we are working with the Communications Security Establishment to ensure the integrity of the devices.

Jacques Mailloux, Executive Director, Electoral Innovation, provided an update on the Polling Place Process Enhancement project, about which the Committee was consulted in September 2016. Specifically, he advised the Committee that EC had selected to implement the model with separate full-service and express tables enabled by technology. This model would include an electronic poll book and list that is shared among all service points (polling station or table) in a polling place to enable the sharing of the list of electors between tables in a polling place. This would allow an elector to be served at the next available service point, rather than having to vote at a specific, pre-assigned service point within a polling place. We expect significant improvements in average wait times once this process is applied. The proposed model, which was generally seen as more simple and efficient, also has the support of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC) and the Advisory Group for Disability Issues (AGDI).

Mr. Mailloux also summarized some of the assumptions regarding EC's current deployment strategy. That is, there will be two separate business models supporting voting administration in the next general election: one enabled by technology where needed and one without technology. A final deployment strategy will also consider costs, reliability, viability and residual system-wide risks, all of which will be confirmed through procurement processes over the spring and summer.

Round Table Discussion

A member enquired about the status of the proposed legislative changes required for the implementation of the proposed voting model. Anne Lawson, General Counsel and Senior Director, Legal Services, answered that PROC has published three interim reports endorsing the CEO's recommendations in this regard.

Some members expressed their concerns about security, privacy and potential failures of the voting model. Mr. Mailloux assured members that protecting the privacy of Canadians is a top priority for EC and that safeguards have been included as part of the procurement process. As for potential failures of the new system, EC officials clarified that it would be possible to adapt operations to fall back on the current voting process.

There were questions regarding "bingo sheets," which refer to the forms used to record the identifier number of electors who came to vote, in the new model. Mr. Mailloux explained that bingo sheets would not be in real time as the network in polling places would not be connected to the Internet for security reasons. Data would be transferred from internal networks to external machines using USB keys, but the exact process has not been finalized.

Overall, members supported the Polling Place Process Enhancement project and expressed their interest in knowing more about future opportunities for their participation and engagement.

Political Entities Service Centre

Denis Bazinet, Director, Electoral Operations Planning & Administration, presented the Political Entities Service Centre, an online portal where political entities can access electoral services and information from anywhere at any time. This initiative aims to respond to service delivery issues and barriers experienced during the last election, enhance service accessibility and address the needs of political entities through transactional and informational services.

An initial offering of products and services will be available in November 2018. This may include secure and timely access to communications from EC, training materials, the annual list of electors, candidate nominations and political financing return submissions. Due to security or product development issues, some features may be available online only after the 2019 general election. Future development of the tool would include more enhancements to political financing services and more self-service options to obtain the list of electors, bingo sheets, guidance materials and training materials. Mr. Bazinet added that EC will continue to consult political entities in the lead-up to the project launch to determine their needs and ensure that products and services are relevant and easy to use.

Round Table Discussion

ACPP members appreciated the innovative approach to services for political entities. Members particularly liked the e-nomination process, which would allow candidates and teams to complete, save and submit their nomination candidacy online, make timely and interactive updates and corrections, sign and upload forms, receive instant notifications and reminders, and ultimately make processes more efficient.

Triennial Verification of Party Membership

Mr. Perrault provided an overview of the triennial verification of party membership, which was completed on June 30, 2016, and answered members' questions about the process. Mr. Perrault explained that to register, parties must provide the names and addresses of 250 electors who sign declarations that they are members and support the registration, as stipulated in the *Canada Elections Act* (the Act). The Act further requires parties to have 250 members to maintain their registered status. At the request of the CEO, parties must also provide evidence of their membership. Every three years, parties must submit the names and addresses of 250 electors and their declarations that they are members.

Prior to 2016, the CEO verified declarations upon registration but not as part of the triennial exercise. Verification was done by way of follow-up letters and was limited to declarations from individuals not in the Register. If those verifications raised concerns, EC conducted further verification. In a number of cases, persons contacted did not write back or communicated with EC to say that the declaration was either forged or made under pressure. There were other indicators of potential abuse of the regime.

In 2016, a three-tier approach based on level of electoral support was used to verify party submissions. For parties represented in the House of Commons, EC took the 250 declarations at face value. For parties that were not represented but that received 1,000 votes or more, EC checked the names against the Register and validated electors not in the Register through a mail-in. For parties that were not represented and that received fewer than 1,000 votes, EC systematically confirmed every name.

In terms of lessons learned, EC underestimated the impact on parties of the new approach in the sense that there were a large number of non-responses. Mr. Perrault also agreed that the agency should have been more transparent at the outset in terms of the verification approach. At the same time, the 2016 exercise showed the need for EC to perform verifications to preserve the integrity of the regime. For the next verification, the Act requires that parties provide information to EC in 2019, no later than June 30, 2019 (can be as early as January 1, 2019). However, since EC will accept signatures from the last 12 months, political parties can start collecting signatures as of January 2, 2018.

Round Table Discussion

First, ACPP members noted that the administrative processes associated with the verification and the reliance on regular mail is cumbersome for their membership. ACPP members noted that requiring 250 people to confirm their membership twice (once to the party and a second time to EC) will never produce a 100% response rate. They found that the "double verification" process may discriminate against some small parties as some of their members, specifically young people, renters and low-income electors, are less likely to be on the list of electors. In some cases, individuals do not want to disclose their party affiliation to verify their signatures. The second mailing is sometimes perceived as threatening.

Second, ACPP members wanted to know which members did not confirm membership and questioned why parties cannot have the unaccepted/unverifiable forms sent back to them. Mr. Perrault responded that EC cannot disclose information to parties as there may be cases where potential members were threatened to sign (EC has received complaints in the past of individuals who had felt threatened).

Third, ACPP members provided recommendations on the current process. They wanted the current form to be simplified and reformatted to advise people that a second verification will be required. Other recommendations include using spot checking for those who did not confirm, as well as having returning officers verify signatures. The last suggestion was having EC, rather than political entities, make initial contact with individuals to confirm that they are members of a certain party.

In his wrap-up, Mr. Perrault reminded members that the process requires that signatories be electors. It would be helpful if parties verified that their members are on the voters list, or encouraged them to register. Mr. Perrault mentioned that EC is open to ideas about auditing, such as having a sample verified. Mr. Perrault will re-evaluate the format of verification forms. He will also review the possibility of electronic submissions, especially with the online portal. EC will clearly communicate how membership will be verified prior to the next verification date.

Political Financing Training

Jeff Merrett, Director, Regulatory Instruments & Systems, provided an update on the status of political financing audits from the 2015 general election. He also presented EC's plans and initiatives for political financing training in 2017–2018.

Mr. Merrett indicated that a total of 33 sessions were conducted in 16 cities across Canada in 2017. Approximately 400 people participated and gave high ratings for the program. In 2018, EC will be implementing a new integrated training strategy that takes into account:

- size and location of audience
- previous engagement with political entities
- skills and experience level fluctuations
- needs of ongoing versus event-based political entities
- general content versus entity-specific content
- gaps in outreach plan and evaluation and stakeholder engagement

The second new initiative is WebEx sessions. Six sessions were delivered to 75 participants in March 2017 prior to the electoral district association filing deadline. Three sessions were delivered to 10 participants in May 2017 following the by-election. Participants had the option to join by phone and/or online, and gave positive feedback. The third new initiative is political entity online training. Online training modules are being developed. Each will be one to four minutes long, followed by a quiz. Currently, six modules are on the EC website, but additional modules are being created.

Mr. Merrett also informed members of the plan to modernize communications and to host live interactive training sessions for the Electronic Financial Return (EFR) software. There will also be regular web sessions on specific political financing subjects of interest to help political entities fulfill their roles. In addition, EC will be holding focus groups and consulting financial agents, official agents and auditors to obtain input on EFR modernization and the online tutorials offered by EC, evaluate usage and satisfaction, and determine new tools to be developed.

Electronic Financial Return Modernization

Mr. Merrett also provided upcoming modernization initiatives for the EFR system. EFR is a software program used to report financial information. It allows political entities to record financial transactions, creates financial returns based on information entered, and generates receipts for contributions. However, there are limitations to the current EFR system. It was developed in 2003, with design limitations that make maintenance labour-intensive and costly. There is also a lack of interoperability across operating systems, and manual paper-based submissions of signed financial returns are still required.

EC intends to replace EFR with EFR-Online before the next general election. The new system will simplify data capture and reporting, work across operating systems and devices, and include a complete electronic filing solution. EC is currently articulating and defining business needs and requirements, researching available solutions and outlining a strategic direction. EC will engage with political entities and other stakeholders to better understand their needs and expectations.

Accessibility Update

Susan Torosian, Executive Director, Policy and Public Affairs, provided an update on accessibility. First, she summarized the suggestions for political parties and candidates that AGDI had raised in 2016:

- Initiate discussions with people with disabilities, including greater candidate outreach to people with disabilities

- Plan and hold sensitivity training on issues affecting people with disabilities

- Ensure accessibility of websites, including accessible videos of party platforms that provide subtitles, descriptive audio, ASL, LSQ, etc.

- Ensure offices and events (such as all-candidates meetings) are physically accessible

- Write all messages in plain language

- Hire people with disabilities and support candidates with disabilities

Ms. Torosian reiterated that EC is committed to engaging people with disabilities in the decisions that affect their voting experience and that it will continue to improve service offerings to make them more inclusive. EC is therefore planning a range of accessibility enhancements that have been identified by electors and by AGDI, such as:

- ballot redesign to improve readability

- Braille/Tactile Voting Template improvements

- larger, easy-grip pencils for ballot marking

- signature guides for electors who are blind

- continued focus on physical accessibility of polling places

- continued research and in-house testing of Optical Character Recognition technology (smartphone text-to-speech applications)

EC will be developing and distributing information and guidance on services and products for electors with disabilities to candidates and political parties prior to the next general election. ACPP members will be consulted in the coming months on the clarity of the information, and on opportunities and implementation barriers that parties and candidates may face.

Meeting Adjournment and Forward Calendar

In closing, the CEO thanked ACPP members for their participation, feedback and comments. He reminded members that they should expect to be consulted on current and upcoming initiatives, as the agency will need to get parties' views on some courses of action.

Appendix A: Agenda

**Meeting of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties
and OGI Steering Committee**

DoubleTree by Hilton
1170 Aylmer Road, Gatineau, Quebec

AGENDA

Day 1: Monday, June 19, 2017

Time	Agenda Item
8:00–9:00	*Breakfast and Registration*
9:00–9:15	Welcome
9:15–10:30	Acting CEO's Introductory Remarks
10:30–10:45	*Break*
10:45–12:15	Electoral Services Modernization
12:15–13:15	*Lunch (served on site)*
13:15–14:45	Political Entities Service Centre
14:45–15:00	*Break*
15:00–15:55	Triennial Verification of Party Membership
15:55–16:15	Wrap-up of Day 1

Day 2: Tuesday, June 20, 2017

Time	Agenda Item
8:00–9:00	*Breakfast*
9:00–9:10	Welcome
9:10–10:20	Political Financing
10:20–10:35	*Break*
10:35–11:05	Accessibility Update
11:05–12:05	Meeting Adjournment and Forward Calendar
12:05–13:05	*Lunch (served on site)*
13:05–14:20	OGI Steering Committee Meeting

Appendix B: Meeting Participants

Political Party	Representative(s)
Animal Protection Party of Canada	Stephen Best Liz White
Christian Heritage Party of Canada	Rod Taylor Peter Vogel
Communist Party of Canada	Elizabeth Rowley Andrew Garvie
Conservative Party of Canada	Greg Labuschagne Dustin Van Vugt
Green Party of Canada	Nick Carter Marlene Wells
Liberal Party of Canada	John Arnold Azam Ishmael Braeden Caley
Marijuana Party	John Akpata Talis Brauns
Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada	Anna Di Carlo Louis Lang
National Advancement Party of Canada	Stephen Garvey
Pirate Party of Canada	Travis McCrea Bailey Lamon
Progressive Canadian Party	Al Gullon
Rhinoceros Party	Jean-Patrick Berthiaume Pascal Gélinas