

ACTIVITY PLAN 2023-26

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer



MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

It is with pleasure that I present the 2023-2026 Activity Plan for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer (OCEO).

The OCEO, or Elections Newfoundland and Labrador, is responsible for exercising general direction and supervision over the administrative conduct of elections and for enforcing fairness, impartiality, and compliance with the **Elections Act, 1991** ('the Act').

This activity plan describes the OCEO's overall work program, establishes our priorities, and indicates the performance measures expected to be achieved over the next three years.

The OCEO is considered a Category 3 entity under the **Transparency and Accountability Act**. Therefore, an Activity Plan that sets a clear direction of the actions that have to be completed to fulfill the mandate of the OCEO must be prepared. As the Chief Electoral Officer, I am accountable for the preparation of this plan and for the achievement of its goals and objectives.



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Chief Electoral Officer (Acting)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
OVERVIEW.....	3
Demographics	3
Legislation	3
Technology	3
Staff	4
Budget	4
MANDATE.....	4
VISION.....	5
VALUES	5
LINES OF BUSINESS.....	6
Facilitate Electors’ Right to Vote	6
Election Preparation	6
Election Training.....	7
Communications & Outreach	7
Voter Registry & Boundary Issues	8
Election Finance.....	8
PRIMARY CLIENTS	9
ACTIVITIES	9
PREPAREDNESS.....	9
MAINTENANCE	11

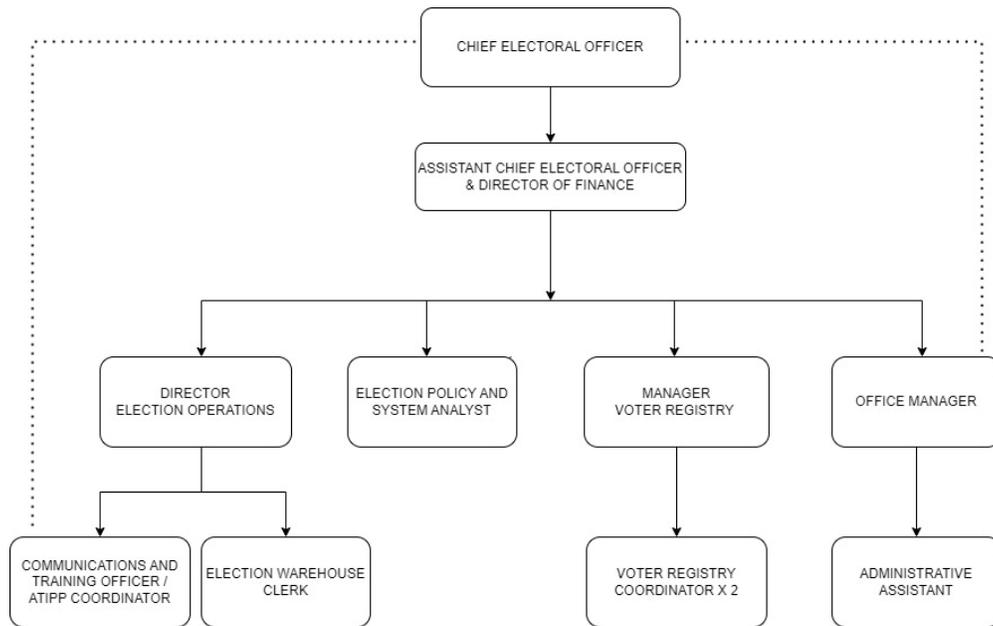
INTRODUCTION

The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer (OCEO) is a non-partisan office responsible for the conduct of provincial elections, by-elections and plebiscites. The OCEO is accountable to the House of Assembly and to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The OCEO is responsible for ensuring fairness, impartiality and compliance with all aspects of the Act.

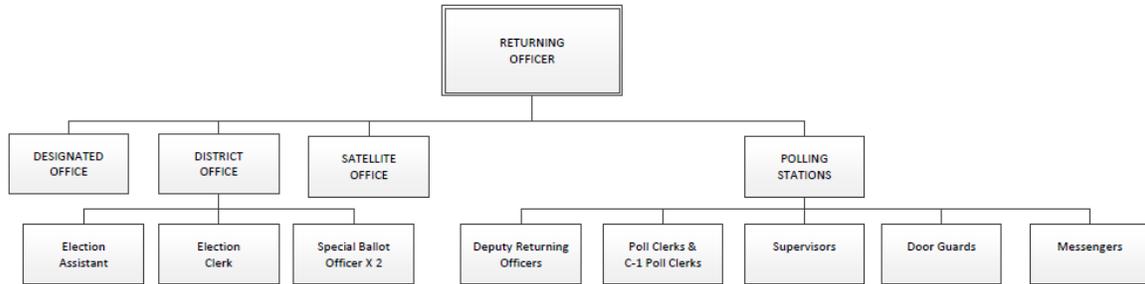
In addition to responsibilities associated with provincial elections, the OCEO works cooperatively with federal, provincial and municipal governments in the sharing of information relative to the maintenance of an accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date permanent list of electors. These initiatives are supplemented by promotional activities and educational programs aimed at encouraging voter registration.

The OCEO's headquarters in St. John's has eleven permanent employees, organized throughout the following divisions: Executive, Executive Support, Election Finance, Election Operations and Voter Registry.



A significant number of temporary office employees and electoral field staff supplements this core group during electoral events. During a general election, the OCEO is responsible for hiring and training over 4,000 temporary employees from 50 field offices to deliver this event.

There are 40 electoral districts in Newfoundland and Labrador. The organizational chart below outlines the staffing requirements of a sample district head office (Returning Officer, Election Clerk and Special Ballot Officers), as well as the district Returning Officer's responsibility in terms of hiring and training staff for each polling station:



The contributions of these temporary employees before, during, and after electoral events are invaluable to the OCEO.

The number of polls required in each district varies greatly, and is determined based on factors such as population and geography. According to the Act, a poll shall wherever practicable contain no more than 275 electors (section 28). The Act also states that where the number of names on the list of electors for a poll exceeds 325 or where he or she considers it appropriate to do so, a Returning Officer may split the poll with the permission of the CEO (section 83).

In the 2021 General Election a total of 33,584 votes were cast at 159 advance polling locations. The OCEO planned to use over 1,500 regular polls on polling day, however in-person voting was suspended and voting was conducted via Special Ballot. There were 157,492 Special Ballot kits issued during the 2021 General Election.

The OCEO is located at 39 Hallett Crescent, St. John's, in the O'Leary Industrial Park. The telephone number is (709) 729-0712. The Elections Newfoundland and Labrador website (www.elections.gov.nl.ca) provides information about the OCEO itself, as well as information for electors about the voting process.

OVERVIEW

An Activity Plan must take into account the external and internal environments that affect the organization's ability to achieve its goals and objectives. Several factors affect the OCEO's planning.

Demographics

To effectively serve the electorate of the province, the population's demographics must be taken into consideration. The OCEO must be knowledgeable of different elector groups and their specific needs. For example, Special Ballot voting is offered to residents of personal care homes and patients in hospitals around the province on a date prior to the advance poll and regular polling day. This procedure allows residents and patients the option to vote without having to leave the premises. The OCEO must also consider the geographical location of polling stations to ensure that electors have reasonable access to voting facilities.

In addition, Special Ballot voting is available to those electors who will be unable to vote in person at the advance poll or on regular polling day. This voting option may fit persons working at remote work sites, students who are pursuing studies either out of the province or outside their home district or incarcerated electors.

OCEO's advertising plan includes a detailed analysis of the scope of radio, newspaper, mail and online advertising to determine which advertising mediums will most effectively communicate key messages. We actively choose varying advertising mediums to reach as many electors as possible.

Legislation

Election planning must be in line with current legislative requirements and the OCEO must be prepared to adapt to changes in legislation and the challenges those changes can present.

Technology

Technological advancement is an intricate part of today's society. As technology changes, the expectations of the electorate changes. We monitor technological advances in electoral events, in other jurisdictions in particular, and innovate to ensure that we are able to respond to electors' expectations in a way that is within the confines of our legislation.

Staff

The OCEO maintains a state of readiness for elections and by-elections. Although current legislation provides for fixed-date general elections, by-elections can occur at any time, in any district in the province. Additionally, though fixed-date legislation exists, general elections can be called at any time if certain circumstances present themselves. An example is upon the resignation of the Premier of the province, a general election must be called a year from the swearing-in of the new Premier. It is imperative that all staff be well trained in electoral procedures to properly respond when an electoral event occurs.

Budget

Budgetary decisions at the OCEO are primarily driven by electoral events. The operating budget of the OCEO during a non-event year is approximately \$1,500,000. If a by-election is called, the cost of administering an individual by-election is approximately \$150,000, depending on the electoral district. The OCEO does not budget for these events each year as by-elections can be called at any time, multiple by-elections can be held in a given year, or there may not be any by-elections in a year. During a year in which a general election is called, the OCEO budget is approximately \$8,000,000. The OCEO appropriately prepares budget submissions in election years and in the years leading up to general elections to reflect the increased staffing, materials, and expenditures required for the administration of a general election.

MANDATE

In accordance with the **Elections Act, 1991**, it is the duty of the Chief Electoral Officer to:

- (a) exercise general direction and supervision over the administrative conduct of elections and to enforce on the part of election officers fairness, impartiality and compliance with [the Act];
- (b) issue to election officers those instructions that he or she considers necessary to ensure effective execution of [the Act]; and
- (c) perform all other duties that are imposed on him or her by or under [the Act].

VISION

OCEO's vision is to be an organization that inspires confidence on the part of all those involved in the electoral process by exercising impartiality, excellence, and professionalism.

VALUES

OCEO recognizes the importance of having formal values in place and in communicating them to staff.

VALUES	ACTION STATEMENTS
Confidence	Approach your duties with the confidence that you are knowledgeable in your field and properly trained. Pursue professional and personal development and strive to create confidence amongst your coworkers. Be proud of what you accomplish.
Integrity	Exhibit the courage to face problems, accept responsibility for your actions and work towards solutions. Take pride in the fact that you have given a fair and honest effort.
Fairness	Perform all tasks and duties with a view to ensuring the electoral process is fair for all involved.
Impartiality	Maintain a non-partisan environment in your dealings with all stakeholders.
Accountability	Hold yourself accountable for what you do and expect others to do the same.
Professionalism	Strive to maintain professionalism in your day-to-day interactions with coworkers, as well as with all other stakeholders. Use a customer service based, innovative approach to help electors find the best voting option to suit their needs, resulting in a positive voting experience.

LINES OF BUSINESS

The OCEO provides the following lines of business in carrying out its mandate:

Facilitate Electors' Right to Vote

Every Canadian citizen who is 18 years of age or older and is a resident of Newfoundland and Labrador has the right to vote. The OCEO facilitates this right by communicating to electors how, when and where to vote: 'how' encompasses the various voting methods available; 'when' details the dates and deadlines that apply to those voting methods; and, 'where' relates to the locations where voting is available. The OCEO works to ensure our headquarters and field staff are well trained in electoral processes and procedures so the electorate will have the best possible election experience.

Election Preparation

Preparation for an election is a continuous cycle consisting of a number of duties and responsibilities, including:

- Overall logistical, operational, and resource management planning of an election event;
- procurement and maintenance of supplies for over 50 Returning Offices and satellite offices;
- coordination and delivery of supplies throughout all parts of Newfoundland and Labrador (factoring in geographical and weather challenges);
- recruitment of over 200 Returning Officers, Election Officials, and headquarters staff;
- testing and evaluating equipment and software;
- incorporating new technology into election processes and training materials;
- designing and delivering on-line and in-person training modules;
- updating the Voter Registry using multiple points of data and maintaining polling division boundaries;
- evaluating short and long-term planning objectives,
- engaging with stakeholders and incorporating feedback into electoral processes; and,
- maintenance of communication channels with internal and external stakeholders, including advertising and outreach campaigns.

Election Training

The staff at the OCEO is responsible for designing and delivering election training to all field staff required for the electoral event. In the case of a general election, training is delivered to over 200 Returning Officers, Election Clerks, Election Assistants, and Special Ballot Officers. Training packages are also provided to the Returning Officers to use in training their own poll staff which, throughout the entire province, is in excess of 4,000 people.

The OCEO holds multiple training sessions each year for Returning Officers and in the lead up to an election for Election Workers. The content is developed in-house and is delivered and facilitated by OCEO core staff members. The OCEO updates this training as internal processes are modified to make the delivery of a voting event more efficient and voter centric.

The ability to deliver and design training for multiple audiences requires that the staff at OCEO stay up to date on adult learning principles, curriculum design, and facilitation techniques. This is achieved through continuous training for internal staff and participation in inter-jurisdictional groups on new and innovative electoral training techniques and practices.

Communications & Outreach

Information pertinent to an electoral event must be communicated to the public clearly and in a timely manner.

For a general election, the OCEO typically launches three campaigns for advertising: 'Are you on the Voters List', Special Ballot voting, and General Election Information. These campaigns include print, radio and online advertising, as well as householder mail-outs and an addressed Voter Information Card that is distributed to all registered voters in the province. Twitter is also used to relay messages to the public.

The OCEO's website (www.elections.gov.nl.ca) is an effective tool in the communication of up-to-date information pertaining to its business operation. The website contains resources specific to electors, political parties and candidates.

Public notices, public service announcements, information brochures, news releases and media kits are also a few of the tools used to inform key stakeholders about our processes.

In terms of outreach, the OCEO works with public interest groups and community groups in an effort to better meet their needs.

Voter Registry & Boundary Issues

The Voter Registry division of the OCEO maintains voter and geographic data necessary to ensure a constant state of readiness for elections, by-elections, plebiscites and/or boundary redistribution.

The exchange of information with federal, provincial and municipal governments, as well as the continuous updating of both voter and geographic data are key functions of the Voter Registry.

In addition, the Voter Registry provides a range of services to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians during and between electoral events. This is achieved through the maintenance of voter and address data; implementation of voting area boundary adjustments; managing address resolution and collection; and responding to information requests and ensuring safeguarding of data.

Finally, voter data is exchanged with municipalities and school boards for their respective elections.

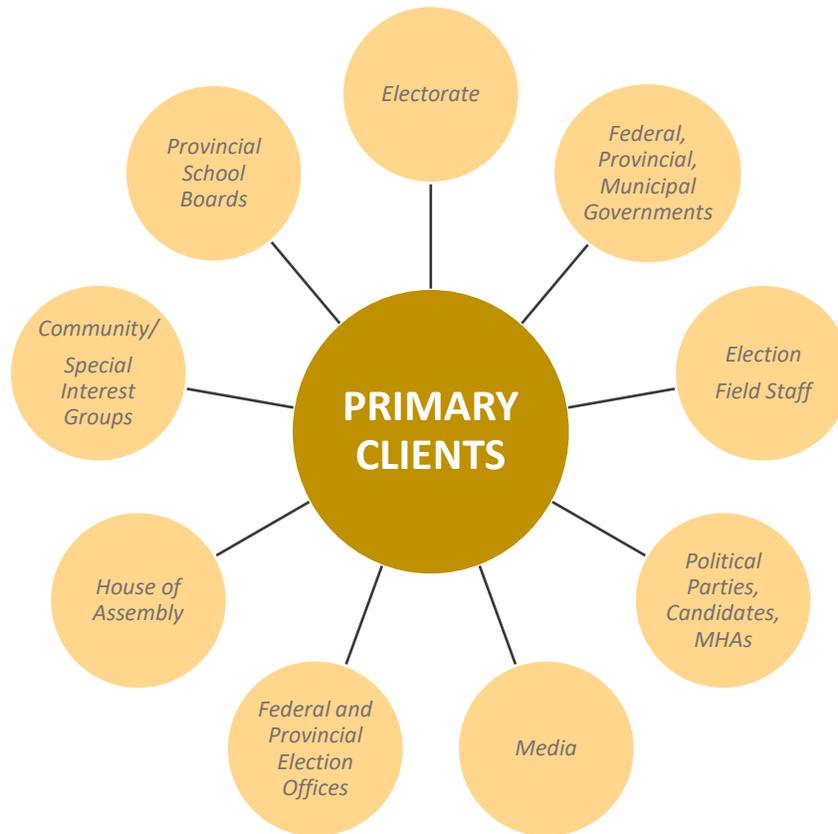
Election Finance

The Election Finance area provides education, guidance and assistance to candidates and political parties with respect to the Election Finance provisions of Part III of the **Elections Act, 1991**.

Duties in this area include examination of financial returns from political parties and election candidates, provision of guidelines respecting Part III requirements to auditors, registered candidates and political parties, reimbursement of election expenses and publishing of reports upon the affairs of the office concerning political financing.

PRIMARY CLIENTS

Primary clients are the individuals, groups and organizations that the OCEO deals with on a regular basis. Serving these groups is the office's priority and requires significant use of available resources and services.



ACTIVITIES

PREPAREDNESS

All business areas of the OCEO must work cohesively to ensure election readiness.

The Election Operations division of the OCEO is responsible for the overall administration of an election. This covers an array of areas such as Special Ballot voting, advance and regular poll voting, election training, creation and revision of election forms, ordering and distribution of election supplies, recruitment of election officials and advertising and communications initiatives.

In between general elections, work is completed to evaluate, research and amend administrative procedures; review and revise election training; ensure all supplies required to administer an election are on site and ready for distribution; and recruit election staff for district and headquarters support.

Objective #1: By March 2024, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer will have completed integration of new election management software into election operations.

Indicators:

- Software tested and integrated with OCEO platforms and equipment.
 - Elections officials fully trained on use of new election management software.
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Objective #2: By March 2025, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer will have completed all electoral readiness measures.

Indicators:

- Completed training sessions for all Returning Officers, Election Clerks and Special Ballot Officers.
 - Completed assembly of election supplies for deployment to all district Returning Offices.
 - Completed all planned District Site Visits.
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Objective #3: By March 2026, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer will have completed Newfoundland and Labrador's 52nd general election and will have initiated election evaluation processes.

Indicators:

- Initiated logistics and planning for election debriefing meetings throughout the province with Returning Officers and Election Officials.
 - Initiated process for evaluation of all election forms, training materials, and procedures for improvement post-election.
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MAINTENANCE

An integral part of the election process is the maintenance of the permanent list of electors, which must be up to date to ensure an accurate elector database and properly maintained electoral boundaries and polling divisions.

The objective and indicators below will be reported on each year in the planning cycle.

Annual Objective: By March 2024, 2025 and 2026, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer will have maintained the Voter Registry to ensure readiness for elections and by-elections, and will report on this objective each year in the planning cycle.

Indicators:

- Maintained the permanent list of electors.
- Apportioned population to polling divisions within established electoral districts based on feedback from district Returning Officers.
- Explored options for future developments and improvements to electoral management systems.