

# Best Practices for Municipal Elections During COVID-19

September 2020

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## 1. Introduction

*The Local Government Election Act, 2015* sets the municipal election for cities, towns, villages, rural municipalities and most northern municipalities for Monday, November 9, 2020.

Each municipality is responsible for conducting its municipal election in accordance with *The Local Government Election Act, 2015*. The Ministry of Government Relations recognizes that due to COVID-19, election officials and candidates are facing unexpected challenges that did not exist in previous municipal elections. Public health orders apply to municipalities' election processes and to candidates and voters.

In the interest of sharing electoral best practices, this resource will assist election officials and candidates to plan and carry out the duties and responsibilities of holding municipal elections in a manner to ensure voters are safe.

**Note that this document has no legal authority. It is intended for reference and resource purposes only and not as a replacement for the legislation, the *Re-open Saskatchewan Plan* or Public Health Orders issued by the Chief Medical Health Officer.**

### Key Links

[\*The Local Government Election Act, 2015\*](#)

[\*Re-open Saskatchewan Plan\*](#)

[Public Health Orders](#) issued by the Chief Medical Health Officer:

In addition, Saskatchewan has recently added '[Election Activities](#)' to the list of critical public services and allowable business services and events, activities, and outdoor spaces in their region.

## 2. Best Practices

### Candidates

As of July 21, 2020, the Government of Saskatchewan, as part of the *Re-open Saskatchewan Plan*, allows [door to door canvassing](#). This includes the ability for candidates to campaign in an election.

Candidates are required to maintain physical distancing when visiting a residence and are encouraged to practice frequent hand hygiene and not to share common materials including pens, pencils and promotional materials.

The City of Saskatoon has also prepared an [information guide](#) for persons seeking election or re-election for council.

Candidates and candidate's agents have the right to be in attendance at advance polls or the poll on election day. Candidates and candidate's agents will be subject to the same physical distancing requirements as voters and should be encouraged to wear a mask while in the polling area.

## Polling Places

The council for the election day and the Returning Officer for advance polls, shall determine the polling places for elections.

Council and the Returning Officer should consider polling areas that will comply with Public Health Orders as it relates to physical distancing requirements for voters and election officials.

Some best practices regarding polling places include:

- using community and recreation facilities that enable staff, poll workers and citizens to maintain a safe distance (e.g. 2 metres/6 feet) from each other at all times;
- considering facilities that accommodate potential line ups and inclement weather;
- sufficient space and tables for accommodating voter's registration forms and showing identification;
- handwashing facilities or sanitizing stations in prominent locations throughout the venue;
- using protective screens between election officials, citizens, ballot boxes; and
- using facilities that can provide separate or different entrance and exit paths to help manage the flow of voters.

## At and In Polling Stations

Once the polling places are established, the Returning Officer is responsible for determining the physical layout of and conduct in the polling areas. Matters that should be considered include:

- physical distancing in the polls for voters, election officials and candidates/candidates' agents;
- providing markings inside or outside the polling to ensure social distancing of 2 metres (6 feet);
- instructional posters outside polling areas regarding self-assessment and physical distancing;
- hand sanitizer and/or dispensers available for use at all polls in several or prominent locations with tissues and lined waste containers;
- disinfectant so that polls can be sanitized throughout the day, particularly frequently-touched surface areas such as voting areas/booths, ballot boxes, desks, tables, railings, washrooms, writing utensils, door handles, light switches and seating areas (if any);
- protective dividers (e.g. plexi-glass) to separate the voter from the Deputy Officer and Poll Clerk from voters;
- tables for election officials to verify identification visually rather than handling;
- offering single-use pencils (e.g. golf pencils) to mark ballots that voters can then take home;
- encouraging voters and election officials to wear a mask in the polling area and utilize handwashing facilities or hand sanitizing prior to entering or voting; and
- in the instance where a voter's list is not used, recommending that voters complete [Form R – Voter's Declaration Form](#) prior to attending the poll.

Deputy Returning Officers are responsible for the set-up of polls and conduct of voters and candidates/candidate's agents in the polling area in accordance with the directions set out by the Returning Officer.

## Election Officials

Election officials may need reminding and/or training regarding safe election practices and COVID-19 precautions including:

- physical distancing in polling places;
- hand washing hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette or use of personal protective equipment (PPE);
- avoiding the sharing of equipment, writing utensils, clipboards or disinfecting in between sharing with other officials if materials and equipment must be shared; and
- the safe handling of election materials (e.g. identification, forms, ballots), for example placing identification on a table for the election official to check visually instead of handling.

Returning Officers may wish to consider additional election officials (special constables, [PPE co-coordinator](#)) to assist in the conduct of the municipal election.

Additional election officials can provide assistance by:

- controlling the number of voters allowed in the polling area so as not to exceed the required number of people in an enclosed area at one time;
- ensuring voters are maintaining proper physical distancing of 2 metres (6 feet);
- direct voters to the correct path to follow in the polling area to maintain physical distancing; and
- sanitizing the polling area throughout the day, particularly high touch areas.

## Communicating with Voters

Municipalities and Returning Officers should consider a communication plan and strategy for voters that addresses COVID-19 and encourages personal health and safety measures to help ensure a safe local election in your community.

A communications plan can assist voters with better understanding the following:

- advance voting opportunities and options such as advance polls, mail-in ballots and extended hours polls on election day;
- any alternate voting methods the community is implementing to reduce in-person contact and as an option for individuals that are ill, have limited mobility or may be in self-isolation;
- the general procedures and measures being taken by your community on election day to ensure a safe election;
- how voters may vote at off-peak times (if known from previous election experiences);
- general health and safety measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including encouraging voters to wear a mask, using hand washing and hand sanitizing, coughing/sneezing etiquette;
- specific things voters can do to help your community achieve a safe election such as bringing their own pencil, leaving the poll once they have voted, and social distancing; and
- where residents should direct their questions about the municipal election in their community (e.g. municipal administrator, returning officer, municipal website, etc.).

### 3. Elections Saskatchewan Resources

While Elections Saskatchewan does not oversee municipal elections, they have a number of resources to share with municipalities. These include samples of posters, ads, poll location signage and election event icons that can be downloaded by municipalities to use for municipal elections. Visit [Shareable tools](#) on the Election Saskatchewan website for more information.

Election Saskatchewan has also agreed to make available to municipalities any unused PPE from the October 26, 2020 provincial election. This includes left over hand sanitizer, pencils, cardboard voting dividers and other materials that are intact and remain usable after the provincial election. The material will be made available through the local provincial election officer and will be on a first-come, first-serve basis. Returning Officers can contact their local election officer **after** 10 a.m. on Wednesday, October 28, 2020. The name and contact information for the person in your area will be listed on the Election Saskatchewan website after the provincial election campaign has begun.

### 4. Other Resources

Saskatchewan municipalities are encouraged to learn from each other and visit municipal websites of other municipalities in Saskatchewan and elsewhere for the measures and innovations being undertaken to help ensure a safe local election. Several communities are using mail-in ballots, advance polls, curbside and mobile polls. Do an internet search and you may be surprised what you find!

The Provinces of [Nova Scotia](#) and [British Columbia](#) have also prepared on-line best practices and guides for municipalities to administer municipal elections. These may provide helpful tips that may be applied to help assist the conduct of your municipal election.

### 5. Technical Information

Technical information about the upcoming municipal elections may be obtained by contacting a municipal advisor at the Ministry of Government Relations at 306-787-2680 or [muninfo@gov.sk.ca](mailto:muninfo@gov.sk.ca).