

5

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS



Municipal elections provide citizens with an opportunity to discuss and debate the future direction of their community.

An individual who seeks public office or competes for the role of an elected representative is called a **candidate**. It is their job to share their vision, ideas and commitment to the position in order to win the support of voters during a campaign.

On October 22, 2018, Ontarians will elect candidates to sit on their municipal councils. The size, arrangement and election of the council differs throughout the province.

Council members can be elected **at-large** (by all eligible voters in the municipality) or by **ward** where the municipality is broken down into smaller geographic areas that elect one or more representatives for their specific ward. The head of council is elected at-large in single-tier or lower-tier municipalities.

An **electoral system** is the way in which we elect our representatives. There are set rules for how preferences are recorded and the methods used for determining which candidate wins. There are many different electoral systems used around the world.

Most municipalities in Ontario use a system called **First-Past-The-Post** (FPTP). A successful candidate must receive the most votes in order to be elected in their area. In some cases, more than one candidate is elected, either at-large or within a ward. This is called a **multi-member election**. For example, if there are six council members elected at-large, the six candidates with the most number of votes are elected.

Changes to the *Municipal Elections Act* on June 9, 2016 gave municipalities the option of using ranked ballots in municipal elections. In a **ranked ballot** election, you rank candidates according to your preference (first choice, second choice, etc.). Each winning candidate must have a majority of the vote. If all votes are counted and one candidate does not have at least 50 per cent plus 1 of the votes, the candidate with the fewest number of votes is eliminated and the ballots are counted again, this time using the next candidate choice from ballots where the first choice candidate was eliminated. The process is repeated until a winning candidate is determined. The City of London is the first municipality in the province to implement ranked ballots, starting with the 2018 elections.

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In some municipalities, there will be numerous candidates running for a seat on council. In other municipalities, there may only be a few candidates and the race will be less contested. If a candidate has no opponents, or if the number of candidates match the number of council members to be elected, then the candidates automatically win. This is called **acclamation**. When this happens, no vote is held for that race.

To become a candidate in a municipal election in Ontario, you must be at least 18 years of age, a Canadian citizen and be eligible to vote in the election (*see explanation in Unit 8*).

There are many ways to gather information about the election candidates. Community groups and school councils hold town hall meetings or all-candidate debates where citizens are invited to listen to candidates speak on the election issues and ask them questions. Information can also be found on radio and television, media websites or in newspapers and local magazines. Individuals may also visit candidates offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to candidates when they visit homes during door-to-door canvassing. Information may also be found through candidate websites and social media pages.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Which issues are most important in the upcoming election and why? How can I learn about the election candidates? Which candidate(s) most align with my views?

SUMMARY

Elections present an opportunity for citizens to discuss and debate issues of importance and have a voice about the future direction of their community.

In this lesson, students will survey friends and family, and exchange ideas with their peers about which issues are most pressing in their community. After reviewing the concept of political significance, students will establish criteria to evaluate their list of community issues. Students will become acquainted with the municipal election process and their council composition before researching the candidates. In groups, students will collect information about or from their selected candidate. Students will consolidate their learning by reflecting on which issues are most important to them and which candidate(s) most align with their views.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Develop an understanding of the municipal election process (Citizen Framework – Structures);
- Use the political inquiry process and work in a collaborative manner to research the municipal election candidates running;

- Compare and contrast how different candidates will respond to the same political issue (Concepts of Thinking – Political Perspective);
- Develop a sense of their civic self-image by exploring their own political views (Citizen Framework – Identity).

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can explain the municipal election process in my community;
- I can collaborate with my peers to research and present candidate information and their position on select issues;
- I can compare and contrast how different candidates will respond to the same political issue;
- I can evaluate which issues matter most to me and which candidate(s) align with my political views.

CURRICULUM LINKS

CHV2O - Overall Expectations

A1. Political Inquiry: use the political inquiry process and the concepts of political thinking when investigating issues, events, and developments of civic importance
A2. Developing Transferable Skills: apply in everyday contexts skills developed through investigations related to civics and citizenship education, and identify some careers in which civics and citizenship education might be an asset
B1. Civic Issues, Democratic Values: describe beliefs and values associated with democratic citizenship in Canada, and explain how they are related to civic action and to one's position on civic issues
C2. Inclusion and Participation: assess ways in which people express their perspectives on issues of civic importance and how various perspectives, beliefs, and values are recognized and represented in communities in Canada

CHV2O - Specific Expectations

A1.1 formulate different types of questions to guide investigations into issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance
A1.2 select and organize relevant evidence, data, and information on issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance from a variety of primary and secondary sources
A1.3 assess the credibility of sources relevant to their investigations
A1.5 use concepts of political thinking when analyzing and evaluating evidence, data, and information and formulating conclusions and/or judgments about issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance
A1.7 communicate their ideas, arguments, and conclusions using various formats and styles, as appropriate for the intended audiences and purpose
B1.1 describe some civic issues of local, national and/or global significance, and compare the perspectives of different groups on selected issues

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B1.4 communicate their own position on some issues of civic importance at the local, national, and/or global level, explaining how their position is influenced by their beliefs/values

C2.3 describe various ways in which people can access information about civic matters, and assess the effectiveness of ways in which individuals can voice their opinions on these matters

READINESS

Within a few days of the lesson, ask students to survey at least five family or friends in the community about which issues they personally want to see addressed by the new municipal council. This data could be collected through the handout (Activity 5.1) or by creating an online survey using an application (i.e., Kahoot).

MINDS ON

1. Share the following with students.

In any given place – a neighbourhood, municipality, province or country – anywhere that groups of people live together and where the laws of the land affect everyone in a similar way, there will be differences in opinions about how government and society should work, which issues are most important and how best to take action. Giving citizens an opportunity to have a voice in the debate is fundamental to democracy.

2. In small groups, discuss the most pressing issues in your municipality. Use data from the readiness activity, general conversation about the election and/or news articles.

3. As a class, review the concept of *political significance* and co-create criteria to evaluate the list of community issues.

*Teacher note: Recall the definition of **political significance** when developing the criteria. It is a political thinking concept that looks at the importance of particular policies, civic actions, issues, events, or developments, based on their impact on the lives of citizens, or their influence on government decision-making.*

Sample criteria:

Ask students to respond to the following questions for each issue – *Definitely not/Probably not/Probably/Definitely*

- Is the impact long lasting?
- Is the impact extreme – positively or negatively?
- Are many people affected?
- Does it directly affect you, your family and friends?
- Are many people for and/or against it?
- Are the differences between supporters and opponents substantial?

4. Return to small groups and have students rank the issues from the earlier discussion using the criteria established.

5. Follow up with a class discussion to review the small group rankings and come to a consensus on the top three issues facing the community.

ACTION

1. Review the municipal election process in Ontario using the following guiding questions and accompanying slide deck. Add information about the election races in your municipality.

- When is election day?
- How does First-Past-the-Post work?
- How does it compare with ranked ballots?
- How many positions will be elected in our municipal elections?

Teacher note: Currently, all but one municipality in Ontario uses the First-Past-the-Post system. The City of London is the first municipality to adopt a ranked voting system, following legislation passed by the provincial government. Other municipalities are discussing this option for future elections.

2. Find out which candidates are running for election for each applicable race. Show students where they can find this information by visiting your municipality's website.

- Who is running for head of council member? (Mayor or reeve)
- Which candidates are running for council? Are council members elected at-large or by ward?
- If applicable, which ward does your school reside in?

3. Divide the class into pairs or small groups to research the candidates running for election. As a class, develop a checklist for creating a profile and formulate questions based on the top election issues established in the *Minds On* activity. Have students choose how the information will be presented (e.g., poster board, slide deck, video, "fakebook" account, fake Instagram or Twitter feed).

Sample research profile:

- Name and photo
- Personal information (e.g., education, career, accomplishments)
- Priorities (What issues are most important to the candidate?)
- Issues (What is their position or response to the questions concerning the top issues?)

Teacher note: Encourage students to use primary and secondary resources, including news articles and commentary, candidate websites and social media pages, or even contact the candidates directly.

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4. Have each group present their candidate profile and research to the rest of the class. Alternatively, you can post the group work around the classroom walls or create stations, and use a Carousel format where students move in small groups from station to station.

CONSOLIDATION

Have a brief closing discussion about the candidates running for election, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions.

- Which municipal issue is most important to you personally and why? Has your view changed over the course of the election? Why or why not?
- Which candidate(s) align with your views? Which candidate(s) do you think will best address the issues that matter most to you? Explain your reasoning.
- Which candidate(s) will you support and why?
- What do you think has shaped your political views the most? Why is it important to respect others' viewpoints even if they differ from your own?

EXTENSION

An all-candidates debate is an opportunity for the candidates to share their priorities, criticize their opponents' ideas and perform in front of voters. Use Guide 5.3 for suggestions on how to coordinate your own all-candidates debate or watch a video of a debate organized in the community. Which candidate had the best responses and why? Which candidate presented themselves as an effective leader or elected representative?

Teacher note: Alternatively, you could invite each candidate in for a class visit, or conduct a phone or video-phone call interview.