



# Elections New Brunswick



## Annual Report 2018–2019





June 5, 2020

Mr. Don Forestell  
Clerk of Legislative Assembly  
Legislative Building, Centre Block  
P. O. Box 6000  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 5H1  
Canada

Dear Mr. Forestell,

I have the honour of presenting the Annual Report of Elections New Brunswick, for the period April 1, 2018, to March 31, 2019.

I would respectfully request that you forward this report to the members of the Legislative Assembly.

Should members of the Procedure, Privileges, and Legislative Officers Committee wish to have my Office appear before them to answer any questions related to our report, we would be pleased to accommodate at their earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kim Poffenroth', with a stylized, flowing script.

Kimberly A. Poffenroth  
Chief Electoral Officer

**Elections New Brunswick**

**Annual Report  
2018-2019**

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# Message of the Chief Electoral Officer

The cover of our 2018-2019 Annual Report reflects the diverse range of New Brunswickers who were participants in the provincial general election held on September 24, 2018.



The New Brunswickers profiled on our cover represent: the thousands of future voters who learned about civic engagement and democracy in schools across the Province while participating in the Student Vote program; the thousands of first-time voters who cast ballots at our 18 campus voting stations; and the thousands of “veteran voters”, including Amedee Roy, a 106-year-old resident of a long-term care facility in southern New Brunswick, who cast his vote with the assistance of two of our special voting officers.

This year’s annual report highlights the various activities undertaken in preparation for the elections, all of which were executed with the focus of delivering on our mandate of advancing public awareness of and confidence in the electoral process for which we are responsible.

While benefitting significantly from having fixed-date elections in New Brunswick, the preparations in the lead-up to each election we administer are nonetheless extensive. Our efforts in preparing for the 2018 provincial general election were aligned with our vision to make Elections New Brunswick a trusted organization that supports the democratic process by providing innovative electoral services to all New Brunswickers.

I am very pleased to report that, based on the findings of a post-election survey conducted of electors, our hard work paid off. Over 94% of New Brunswickers surveyed indicated it was “very easy” or “easy” to find information about where and when to vote, and over 96% of respondents said they considered Elections New Brunswick a trusted source of information.

Our focus on continuous improvement continues. This year’s report highlights our efforts over the past fiscal year to achieve goals we set for ourselves in our *Strategic Plan 2018-2027*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kim Poffenroth', written in a cursive style.

Kimberly A. Poffenroth  
Chief Electoral Officer

## Overview

Our resiliency was put to the test during the fiscal year covered in this annual report. As the only election management body (EMB) in Canada that is also responsible for administering all municipal elections within its province, 2018 saw us running two sets of municipal by-elections along with planning and administering a provincial general election.

The provincial general election held on September 24, 2018, resulted in New Brunswick voters electing the first minority government in nearly a century. This outcome created an unanticipated set of new challenges for our organization. We found ourselves having to simultaneously juggle the process of winding down one set of elections, preparing to hold municipal by-elections in December, and beginning the preparations to deliver an unscheduled provincial general election with an unknown date.

The convergence of all of these activities, and the resulting operational demands on our organization, required us to redirect our efforts. As a result, we were forced to delay or scale back progress on actions required to achieve some of the strategic goals with which we had anticipated moving forward during the year.

## Who We Are

Elections New Brunswick is responsible for the administration and oversight of provincial elections, municipal general elections, by-elections and plebiscites. We also administer the election of members to district education councils and regional health authority boards, as well as any government ordered referendums.

The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) administers elections to ensure they are fair and free of political influence and conducted in accordance with the *Elections Act* and *Municipal Elections Act*. In addition, the Chief Electoral Officer holds the position of Supervisor of Political Financing and oversees compliance with the *Political Process Financing Act* and the *Transparency in Election Commitments Act*. As an officer of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, the CEO must be non-partisan and may not vote in any election.

Elections New Brunswick has a full-time staffing complement of 16, including the Chief Electoral Officer, with its corporate office located in Fredericton. The CEO is supported in fulfilling her legislated duties by two Assistant Chief Electoral Officers.

*Elections New Brunswick  
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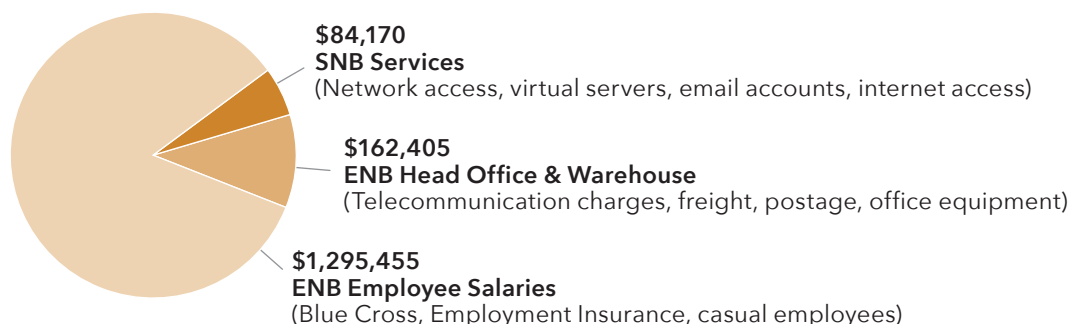


# Financial Summary

Elections New Brunswick submits its annual operating budget to the Legislative Administration Committee (LAC) for approval. Funding for the costs of administering electoral events are included in the budget submission but are treated as an expense over and above our annual operating expenses.

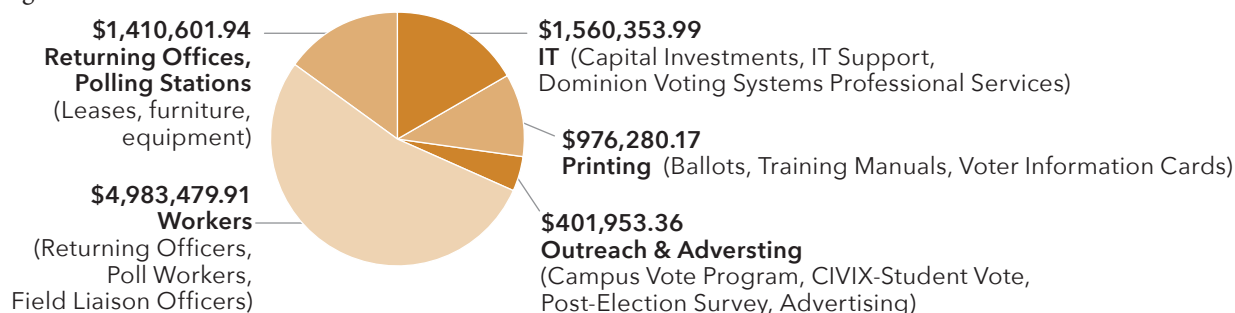
Our annual operating budget for fiscal 2018-2019 was \$1,542,000, the majority of which covers the annual salaries and benefits of full-time employees (see Figure 1). Our staffing complement increased by one position during the fiscal year with the hiring of a junior programmer responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of our voter data base. However, we also ended the fiscal year with a vacancy due to the departure of the senior financial examiner from the political financing team.

Figure 1



The direct cost to administer the 2018 provincial general election was \$12,353,633.80, of which approximately \$1.4 million was incurred in the prior fiscal year to begin preparations for the election. The table below (Figure 2) provides a high-level summary of the expenditures incurred during the election.\*A detailed breakdown is contained in our report on the 39th General Election posted on our website:

Figure 2



\*Financial reimbursements to candidates required under the *Political Process Finance Act* were \$1,537,069.32

With the election of a minority government and the possibility of an unscheduled provincial election being held, Elections New Brunswick immediately began preparations for such an event. This resulted in an unanticipated expenditure of \$1.2 million in the fiscal year to cover such things as:

- the purchase and storage of ballot paper;
- the lease of additional warehouse space;
- the hiring of temporary workers to pack poll worker kits;
- the purchase and printing of poll worker kit materials;
- the printing of training manuals; and
- an extension on the rental of tabulation machines.

In addition, the administration of municipal by-elections held on May 14, 2018, and on December 10, 2018, cost \$774,665, \$539,665 over the \$235,000 budgeted for these events.

## Electoral Events

Much of our focus during fiscal 2018-2019 was on preparing for the September 24, 2018, provincial general election. While New Brunswick benefits from having fixed-date elections, the list of tasks that must be completed prior to placing a ballot in the hands of electors is still extensive.

On May 14, 2018, by-elections were held to fill council vacancies in the municipalities of Atholville (Ward 3), Bas-Caraquet, Bathurst, Dieppe, Fredericton Junction, Saint-André, Sainte-Marie-Saint-Raphaël and St. George. Other vacancies in Grande-Anse, Hartland, Kedgwick, Nackawic, Pointe-Verte, as well as two council positions in Saint-Léolin were filled by acclamation, with only one candidate offering in each. The council position in Florenceville-Bristol remained vacant with no candidate offering for the position.

The September 2018 provincial general election saw the Province's first minority government elected in nearly a century. Three judicial recounts in Oromocto-Lincoln-Fredericton, Saint John Harbour and Memramcook-Tantramar saw the results from election night upheld. A subsequent application was filed with the Court of Queen's Bench to set aside the results of the election in Saint John Harbour.\*

Given the potential for an unscheduled provincial election to be held and the necessity to get ready for such a possibility, we originally decided to delay a set of 24 municipal by-elections from December 2018 until May 2019. However, following a meeting with the Union of New Brunswick Municipalities - who expressed concern over the fact a number of councils were at risk of losing quorum - we reconsidered our plans and rescheduled the by-elections for December 10, 2018.

By-elections were held in Alma, Aroostook, Bathurst, Beaubassin-East, Dalhousie, Doaktown, Hanwell, Hartland, Memramcook, Moncton, Nackawic, Sackville, Shediac, Saint Andrews, St. George, Sussex Corner and Tracadie. Other vacancies in Aroostook, Lac Baker, Minto, Rexton, Salisbury, Sussex Corner, and Tracadie were filled by acclamation. In the case of the three remaining vacancies, no candidates offered for the positions.

\* Note: On August 23, 2019, the judge hearing the Saint John Harbour application released a written decision rejecting the application to set aside the election. The judge ruled that eight people who were not resident in the electoral district were allowed to vote in the district. The judge held that those votes were invalid and must be rejected; however, he upheld the outcome of the election.

## Political Financing

In preparation for the 2018 provincial general election, the political financing section completed the significant task of publishing a new Provincial Political Financing Manual. This manual is the primary reference document for stakeholders involved with the financing of the political process in New Brunswick. Along with reflecting significant legislative changes made to the *Political Process Financing Act* in 2017, the revised manual enumerated guidelines issued by the Supervisor and identified best practices for managing the finances of political entities in New Brunswick.

This was the first general election to be held following the 2015 introduction of legislation requiring nomination contestants of registered political parties to register with Elections New Brunswick and to file financial returns. Having begun work on nomination contests held as early as February 2017, political financing continued throughout the year to process applications for registration, examine financial returns of registrants and publish them on the Elections New Brunswick website.

Coming from all manner of stakeholders, political financing was kept busy responding to inquiries about financial and advertising rules for pre-writ and campaign activities. The section's work continued with the examination of electoral financial returns and the issuance of reimbursements for the election expenses of candidates. Such election-related examinations are in addition to the base workload of annual examinations of financial returns submitted by registered political parties and registered district associations. Due to the sheer volume of work needing to be completed in a timely manner, the political financing team, comprised of three staff, was supplemented by six employees contracted from a chartered professional accounting firm.

Finally, political financing was responsible for the operational implementation of the responsibilities of the Supervisor under the new *Transparency in Election Commitments Act*. In addition to contributing to the policy development by government, staff developed an instruction manual and templates for preparation and submission of election commitments to Elections New Brunswick. Throughout the election period, staff monitored compliance by political parties with this Act.

In addition to the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer responsible for political financing matters, the political financing section consists of one permanent employee and one seconded employee.

## Geography & Mapping

Geography is the starting point of every election. Electors need to know where they will go to vote, and that is determined by the polling division where they live and the polling station to which they are assigned. In the lead-up to the 2018 provincial general election, staff in the geography and mapping section used feedback collected by the 49 returning officers to determine the locations of the 634 polling stations that were opened across the Province during the two days of advance voting and on Election Day.

The geography and mapping section also works with the candidates, making sure they have access to up-to-date maps showing all the streets and roads in the electoral region where they are running.

The geography and mapping section consists of two permanent employees.

## New Brunswick Voter Information Services

The register of electors is a permanent, continually-updated database of New Brunswickers who are qualified to vote in provincial and municipal elections, referendums and plebiscites. It contains the name, address, gender and date of birth of each elector, as well as a unique identifier to help track changes to the elector's record. Elections New Brunswick uses the information in the register to create lists of electors (voters lists) at the beginning of an electoral event.

Maintaining the permanent register of electors requires constant updating of data. The register contains records for nearly 575,000 New Brunswickers, aged 18 and older, who are qualified to vote. Approximately 14% of elector information changes every year. Those individuals who turn 18 and new Canadian citizens are added to the register; the names of deceased electors are removed; and electors who move have their addresses updated.

The register is managed by one employee, with another position budgeted for a junior programmer.

# Operations

The administration of an election requires the coordination of hundreds of moving parts that all need to be managed to have a smooth-running event. The Director of Operations, with assistance from the other members of senior management, coordinates all procurement, finance and administration, information technology and warehousing activities for Elections New Brunswick.

The requirement to be prepared for an unscheduled provincial general election, while still planning for the May 2020 municipal general elections, generated significant resource and logistical challenges for Elections New Brunswick which were successfully coordinated by the operations section.

The operations section consists of six permanent employees.

## Communications and Community Outreach

The approach for informing citizens of an upcoming election has evolved dramatically over the past decade with the emergence of digital media platforms. Election management bodies are now turning to radio, television and social media channels to share important election information. The communications and community outreach section is responsible for the development and deployment of the various communication strategies and outreach activities of the organization.

The communications and community outreach section consists of one permanent employee.

## Activities Related to Strategic Goals

### 1. Encourage voter engagement

#### a. Election-related activities

In preparing for each electoral event, Elections New Brunswick explores opportunities to raise awareness of an approaching election and to provide key information to electors on the various options available to them for voting.

We significantly expanded our efforts for the September 24, 2018 provincial general election, trying new advertising tools to reach electors.

- We replaced our standard postcard-sized mail-out, used to encourage people to check if they are registered to vote, with an expanded flyer. The additional space provided by the expanded flyer allowed us to include other useful information, such as the options for voting, the dates for voting, and the eligibility requirements of an elector.
- We arranged with the New Brunswick Public Libraries to have several key election messages printed on the receipts handed out to clients at the Province's 64 public libraries.
- Tim Hortons customers lining up for their "double-double" viewed 15-second commercials reminding them of the approaching opportunities to vote prior to both advance voting days and Election Day.
- We expanded our campus vote program to cover 18 universities and community colleges across the Province, resulting in a 19% increase over votes collected on campuses in 2014.

Our outreach efforts included engaging future electors by providing a basic overview of the democratic process as well as explaining our role in the administration of elections.

- As we indicated in our last annual report, we partnered with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to deliver the nationally-recognized Student Vote program to the 208 schools that registered for the

program. In the end, nearly 26,000 ballots were cast by students during election simulations in schools located in all 49 electoral districts in the Province.

- Efforts began in the spring of 2018 to identify high school students interested in working as poll workers during the election in the fall. More than 230 students from nearly all electoral districts worked during the general election as constables, voters list officers and poll revision officers.
- In a post-election survey, over 91% of the students who responded indicated that, as a result of this experience, they would be more likely to vote when they reach voting age.



An emerging issue facing election management bodies across the country is the increased use of social media platforms to deliver election campaigns. With that comes a debate on what role, if any, election management bodies should play in moderating the risk of misinformation being posted during an election.

We opted to take a proactive approach to address the potential impact of fake news or misinformation being disseminated during the 2018 provincial general election. We hired a Saint John-based marketing agency who worked with us to create, design and produce a multi-platform social media awareness campaign. Television commercials, Facebook advertisements, YouTube rollups, and a microsite were used to encourage electors to think critically about the accuracy and source of information they might come across during the election.

To help evaluate the effectiveness of our various outreach efforts, Elections New Brunswick commissioned a survey of electors following the election. A random sample of 400 New Brunswick residents were asked about their voting experience, their level of awareness about election information, and their awareness of and trust in Elections New Brunswick.

- Over 92% confirmed that Elections New Brunswick provided them with enough information to know when and where to vote.
- 95% were satisfied or very satisfied with the service provided by election workers at the polling stations.
- Over 96% of respondents considered Elections New Brunswick a trusted source for information.



## b. Examining the youth vote in New Brunswick

Election management bodies across the country face a common trend - an increase in the number of young Canadians who are disengaged or otherwise uninterested in participating in the electoral process.

In 2018-2019, Bridget Beswick-Escanlar, a student enrolled in a master's program at the University of Victoria, approached us with a request to use Elections New Brunswick as a case study for her project examining the decline in youth voter turnout. We readily accepted the invitation and provided Ms. Beswick-Escanlar with access to the relevant data and information related to our past efforts at engaging young voters in New Brunswick.

In November 2018, she submitted her paper, *The Decline of the Youth Vote in New Brunswick: its Causes and the Remedial Role of Electoral Officials*. In February 2019, Bridget produced a subsequent document which offered preliminary recommendations for Elections New Brunswick to consider for enhancing youth voter participation.



**Students at a New Brunswick middle school take part in the national Student Vote program.**



**St. Thomas University in Fredericton was one of 18 universities and community college campuses where Elections New Brunswick set up temporary voting stations for students.**

### **c. Voter registration portal**

We did not achieve our objective of developing and launching an online voter registration portal in time for the September 2018 provincial general election. After we conducted a preliminary threat risk assessment, Service New Brunswick (SNB), which manages government's internet services, recommended that a more comprehensive privacy impact assessment be completed before proceeding.

During 2018-2019, Elections New Brunswick engaged the services of an outside vendor to conduct the privacy impact assessment. The assessment had an expanded scope that reviewed the security of all of our elector data-based processes, including the addition of an online voter registration portal. The privacy impact assessment will be completed in 2020.

## **2. Improve services to political parties**

### **a. Political financing rules and education**

During an election year, inquiries from political parties, official agents and candidates looking for information in preparation for the approaching campaign increase significantly. Elections New Brunswick undertook a number of initiatives in 2018-2019 aimed at helping these participants to navigate the complex rules prescribed in the *Political Process Financing Act*.

- A major undertaking in the lead-up to the September 2018 provincial general election involved the publication of a revised political financing manual in May 2018. In addition to reflecting legislative changes made to the *Political Process Financing Act* in 2017, the manual consolidated many other pre-existing documents and guidelines.
- Two political financing staff members participated in the campaign colleges of four of the six registered political parties to brief them on campaign financing rules.
- Simpler financial returns were introduced for candidates and the registered political parties.
- Elections New Brunswick prepared a revised annual financial return template for political parties. The new format more closely resembles standard financial statements and is more easily prepared from the financial accounting systems used by the registered political parties.

### **b. Election information used by parties**

As part of their campaigning, political parties often contact Elections New Brunswick for information relating to electoral boundaries and where electors will be voting. In previous elections, some parties have only focused their attention on these matters during the election period, when it is too late to make adjustments.

- To avoid confusion created by requests for last minute changes to polling station locations after electors receive their voter information cards, in advance of the provincial general election, Elections New Brunswick provided the public with an opportunity to offer feedback on the polling locations being considered for use in the election. Returning officers were required to submit their selections for polling stations in May, and this information was posted on the Elections New Brunswick website. Electors, candidates and registered political parties were given until June 15, 2018, to provide their feedback to returning officers, after which, locations were finalized.
- Our geography section also provided each of the six registered political parties with two complete sets of printed maps for the 49 electoral districts well in advance of the September election. This structured process for providing maps replaced the previous *ad hoc* on-demand approach, which was more expensive, inconsistent and led to maps being printed throughout the election period.



### 3. Increase efficiency and effectiveness of electoral processes

The electoral processes that we administer during elections are set out in three foundational pieces of legislation: the *Elections Act*, the *Municipal Elections Act* and the *Political Process Financing Act*. While these Acts have had periodic amendments to address changes in election processes and policy reforms over the last 50 years, none have undergone a substantive holistic review.

In our *Strategic Plan 2018-2027*, the modernization of these three pieces of legislation was identified as an action item falling under our strategic goal to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the electoral processes that we administer. With the support of the senior management team, a thorough review was undertaken of each Act to identify sections that are out of step with today's environment and realities. Our goal was to produce a document with substantive recommendations for modernizing our electoral legislation to be released for public feedback. At the end of 2018-2019, this project was ongoing.

### 4. Increase employee satisfaction

Having employees performing duties that follow well-designed processes, ensuring staff is not overburdened, and ensuring staff have the proper training and are being appropriately compensated for their work addresses, in part, our strategic goals of improving workplace efficiency and effectiveness and increasing employee satisfaction.

In 2018-2019, we continued to work with the Office of Strategy Management to align our organizational structure with our strategic goals. A staffing-to-demand exercise was initiated to study our current positions and their current duties, with the objective of determining the amount of work being done, the time required to do this work, and the potential transfer or elimination of duties among the team. That exercise was ongoing at the end of 2018-2019.



**Our warehouse capacity was pushed to the limit, as we prepared for upcoming municipal elections and the potential of an unscheduled provincial election.**



## 5. Improve workplace efficiency and effectiveness

### a. Warehouse operations

With the requirement to conduct ongoing municipal by-elections, conduct a provincial general election, store this material for one year as required by statute, prepare for the 2020 municipal council, district education council, and regional health authority board elections, and the very real possibility of an unscheduled provincial election, our existing warehouse capacity was pushed well beyond its limits. Elections New Brunswick was required to lease additional warehouse space on a temporary basis to accommodate our immediate operational needs.

In alignment with our long-term goal of co-locating our warehouse and head office, discussions started with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure in the fall of 2018 regarding the lease of a building with sufficient space to properly accommodate our warehouse space requirements and our head office. Discussions and preliminary work were ongoing at the end of 2018-2019.

### b. Payment of election workers

In 2018-2019, Elections New Brunswick revised the methods used to process the payments to the thousands of election workers hired temporarily to work for one to three days during an election. Recognizing that one bottleneck in the payment process was the lack of an automated poll worker scheduling system for use in the field, an interim solution was developed in-house during the spring of 2018, using a Microsoft Access database. Returning Officers use the database to schedule training sessions, enter workers and assign them to positions and polling locations. The database creates reports to capture workers' attendance (or absence) at training and at their scheduled work, as well as any authorized mileage claims. Returning officers then use the database to create a final pay document for each worker which lists all authorized payments for that worker.

The database leverages Canada Post data when workers' addresses are entered; as a result, the number of returned cheques due to improper addressing was decreased. A further improvement is the need to only send a single cheque to each individual poll worker because payments for advance poll work, ordinary poll work and mileage claim reimbursements all appear on the same pay document, reducing head office staff effort as well as saving the Province printing and postage costs.



**CEO Kim Poffenroth visits with election workers at a returning office where special voting officers wait to assist electors cast their ballots.**

## 6. Increase organizational resilience

For a small organization like Elections New Brunswick, the departure of even one employee has a significant impact on our ability to deliver services and maintain corporate memory. With a number of key personnel approaching retirement, a knowledge transfer plan was initiated. Initial discussions were held with a number of personnel to determine the current scope of their duties and the potential for transferring some of those duties where it is appropriate.

## Looking Forward

As we enter the next fiscal year, we look forward to making more progress on the targets and goals we set out for the organization in our strategic plan. We will highlight the outcomes of those efforts in the 2019-2020 annual report.

