



# ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

March 2020

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# INTRODUCTION: Why an accessibility plan for Elections Manitoba?

Elections Manitoba has a mandate to make voting accessible. As the organization responsible for ensuring all eligible Manitobans have the opportunity to participate in elections, Elections Manitoba is committed to identifying and removing barriers to full participation.

Current election law already provides many ways for Manitobans with disabilities to easily and independently cast a ballot. In December 2013, *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA)* became law. Under the legislation, public sector organizations must create an accessibility plan and update it regularly. Elections Manitoba continues to build on its achievements in enhancing accessibility to the democratic process in Manitoba.

According to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability, over 230,000 or one in four Manitobans aged 15 years and over, has a disability. This number will grow as our population ages. Barriers to accessibility affect persons with disabilities, their family and friends, and their communities. An accessibility barrier is anything that limits or prevents a person from receiving information, goods and services, from accessing a space or from participating in an activity.

Barriers may be:

- Attitudinal - May result in some people being treated differently than others
- Informational or communication-related - Arise when a person cannot easily receive and/or understand information available to others
- Technological - When technology, or the way it is used, is not accessible to people with disabilities
- Systemic - Policies, practices or procedures that result in unequal access or exclusion for people with disabilities
- Structural - When the environment prevents physical access for people with varied abilities

The AMA provides an opportunity for us to examine our existing practices and processes, celebrate our achievements to date, and identify priorities for eliminating barriers in the future.



## STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Accessibility is an essential part of free and fair elections. Elections Manitoba is committed to ensuring that all eligible voters can access their democratic right to cast a ballot. Election law in Manitoba includes many accessible voting options and Elections Manitoba has developed practices and policies to support accessibility. Elections Manitoba has identified accessibility as an ongoing strategic priority. We will continue to work towards removing barriers to full participation in the democratic process.



# PART I. Elections Manitoba background

Elections Manitoba is the office of the chief electoral officer of Manitoba, the independent office of the Legislative Assembly that conducts provincial elections, byelections and referendums. The office is not part of government; we report to the Legislative Assembly as a whole, through the Speaker. We report annually and after each election and byelection.

Elections Manitoba's work is governed by two laws: *The Elections Act* (EA) sets out the way elections are run and *The Election Financing Act* (EFA) sets out the rules for political participants. These include registered parties, candidates, leadership contestants, constituency associations and third parties.

The main role of Elections Manitoba is to oversee the conduct of provincial elections and byelections in Manitoba. We are responsible for developing processes to ensure that elections are free and fair while meeting legislative requirements. When election law is amended, it is our job to put changes into effect in a timely and efficient way.

Election law also gives Elections Manitoba the authority to provide election information to the public. More specifically, it allows us to create and run election education programs for those people and groups that are most likely to experience barriers to participation.

Political participants and election volunteers must follow many rules and regulations. Elections Manitoba is the best source of accurate information to assist them in following these rules. Elections Manitoba offers information sessions, guides, manuals and one-on-one assistance to political participants.

Elections Manitoba also publishes financial statements of political participants. The public may also view statements in person at our office, on request. Public disclosure ensures transparency and integrity in election spending.

## **STRUCTURE**

Elections Manitoba has a core staff of 23 permanent employees. This number increases significantly during a general election. Headquarters staff grows to approximately 55. Also, the Chief Electoral Officer appoints 57 returning officers (ROs) and 57 assistant returning officers (AROs), one for each electoral division in the province. These officers are responsible for running the election within their own divisions. Each RO/ARO team opens a 'branch office' in their electoral division. In total, ROs and AROs appoint approximately 8,000 people across the province to work as office staff, registration agents, voting officers and in other positions within their own divisions.

## **ELECTION CYCLE**

The work of Elections Manitoba takes place in a four-year cycle, as general elections are usually held once every four years. Manitoba has a set date for provincial general elections. The 42<sup>nd</sup> provincial general election was held September 10, 2019, which was just over one year before the set election date. The next set date is October 3, 2023.

In addition to the election itself, the first year of the election cycle includes wrap-up and closing of returning offices, as well as the return of materials to Elections Manitoba. Following this, registered parties, candidates and third parties must file election financial statements with Elections Manitoba, which are reviewed by staff. At the same time, the organization holds debriefing sessions for election staff and permanent staff and evaluates the conduct of the election. Within six months of the election, Elections Manitoba submits a statement of votes and report on the election to the Legislative Assembly.

To begin the second year of the election cycle, we hold a strategic planning session where we identify priorities and schedule election preparation activities. Year two is focused on detailed planning and implementation, with additional work required when new legislation calls for changes in administrative processes. In years three and four, election activities begin, including training of ROs and AROs, securing office spaces and voting places and ordering materials, recruiting election staff and advertising.

## REFERENDUM

In addition to conducting elections and byelections, Elections Manitoba has the responsibility of conducting referenda. Four provincial laws require a referendum be held under certain circumstances:

- *The Manitoba Hydro Act* – Referendum required to privatize The Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board
- *The Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Protection Act* – Referendum required to increase provincial tax
- *The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act* - Referendum required to privatize The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation
- *The Referendum Act* – Referendum required to make significant changes to Manitoba's voting system

A Referendum Act outlining the rules for calling and conducting referenda was passed in June 2019 but has not come into force.



## **ELECTORAL DIVISIONS BOUNDARIES COMMISSION**

Under *The Electoral Divisions Act*, the Electoral Divisions Boundaries Commission reviews provincial boundaries every 10 years. The Commission is independent and non-partisan.

The most recent review was completed in December 2018, with new boundaries in effect for the 42<sup>nd</sup> provincial general election. Elections Manitoba provided administrative, communications and GIS support to the review process.

As part of the review process, the Commission makes public presentations on the proposed boundary changes. In total, 13 public hearings were held in 12 Manitoba communities.

Once the final report was complete, Elections Manitoba carried out the work of implementing the new boundaries. This included creating new maps for each of the 57 electoral divisions, assigning voting areas and voting places within each electoral division, and updating computer applications with new electoral divisions.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Elections Manitoba must always be prepared to conduct elections, by elections and referendums. The organization operates in a complex environment largely due to the uncertainty of election timing and continuous legislative change.

Between the 2016 and 2019 general elections, there were significant changes made to election law. The most notable was the requirement for Elections Manitoba to create a permanent voter register. This required Elections Manitoba to develop many new processes, materials and training resources.

Although there is a set election date, a general election may be called at any time, and Elections Manitoba must always be ready. When a vacancy occurs within an electoral division, a byelection must be held to fill the vacancy within six months.

A large number of staff is required to complete election activities in a very short timeframe. Most of the 8,000 staff required to run elections are recruited



to work for a very short period of time. Of this number, approximately 6,000 work for a single day, either as voting officers, information officers or registration officers. The preliminary, revised and final voters lists must be completed by specific dates set by law. Elections Manitoba may not accept candidate nominations after the 1:00 pm deadline and must review the nomination forms by the end of the day that nominations close, so that ballots can be printed in time for advance voting.

Another key challenge in an election is space: Locations must be found in each of the 57 electoral divisions for a returning office. Over 900 voting locations are needed for election day and advance voting. Voting locations must be supplied with materials to allow all registered voters to cast a ballot. For the 42<sup>nd</sup> general election, 870,000 ballots were printed.

Finally, there is an ongoing potential need for Elections Manitoba to conduct referendums as required under various laws.

## **ELECTIONS MANITOBA STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

In the strategic planning for the 42<sup>nd</sup> general election, Elections Manitoba identified several priorities to guide election preparation. These general priority areas will continue to be in effect for the next election cycle:

### ***Legislation***

- Implement legislative changes
- Recommend legislative changes to improve administrative practices
- Assist political participants and others to comply with legislation
- Monitor overall compliance with legislation

### ***Service***

- Provide accessible voting opportunities to Manitobans
- Leverage technology innovations in service delivery
- Manage resources efficiently
- Maintain effective budget controls and reporting
- Provide assistance and training to stakeholders
- Provide ongoing training and resources to staff



### ***Accessibility***

- Election law requires that voting places be accessible.
- Continually update Elections Manitoba's plan to meet the standards under the *Accessibility for Manitobans Act* and to identify, remove and prevent barriers faced by persons with disabilities

### ***Innovation***

- Review, assess and change organizational practices, where feasible, to deliver services effectively and efficiently
- Leverage technology to streamline organizational work
- Seek out new ways to improve performance

### ***Engagement***

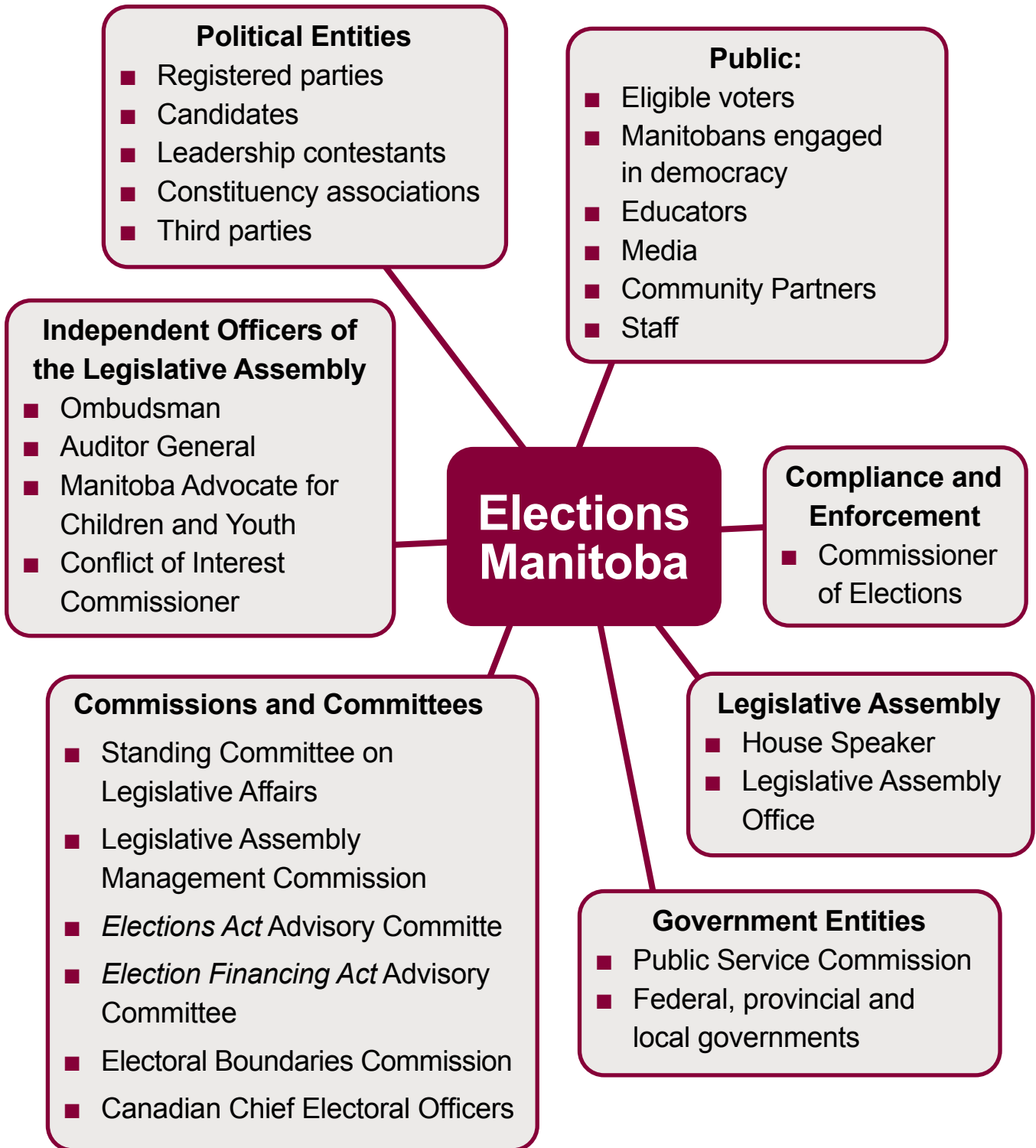
- Maintain and strengthen existing partnerships with organizations, vendors and other stakeholders
- Continue to reach out to existing and future stakeholders, including youth and those disconnected from the voting process
- Identify new approaches to establishing partnerships and conducting effective outreach to support democratic practices

## PART II. Programs and Services of Elections Manitoba

- Conduct elections and byelections
- Conduct referendums
- Education program
- Community outreach program
- Post-secondary outreach program
- Registration of political participants
- Financial compliance assistance
- Review of political participants' annual and election financial returns
- Disclosure of political participants' financial activity



# PART III. Stakeholders/Clients





Our primary stakeholders are eligible Manitoba voters. As per *The Elections Act*, this group includes all Manitobans who are:

- 18 years of age or older
- Canadian citizens
- Residents of Manitoba for six months immediately before election day

Based on an estimate from 2019, there were 915,443 eligible voters at the time of the general election. This is by far the largest stakeholder group of Elections Manitoba.

With eligible voters making up almost 70% of Manitoba's population, it is likely that our stakeholder group has the same proportion of people with disabilities as the overall population.



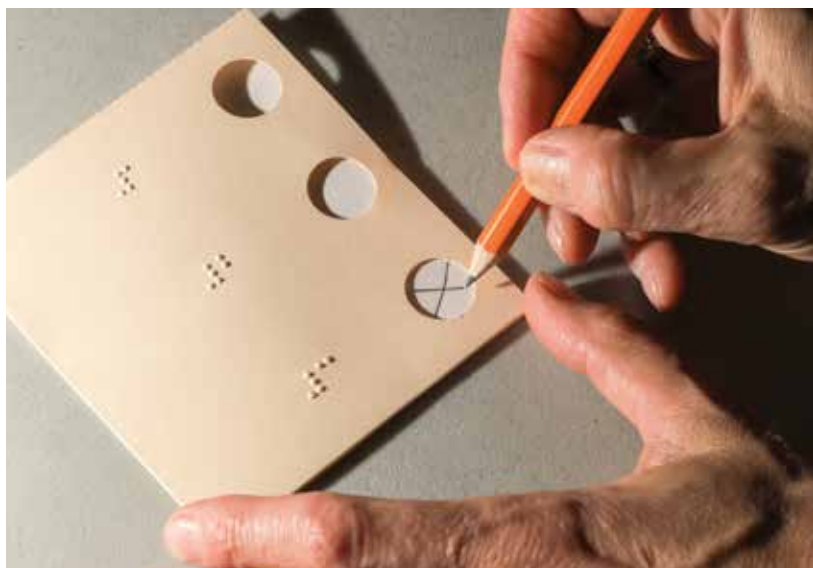
## PART IV. Achievements to date

### a. Legislation:

Current election law eliminates many potential barriers to participation. With a variety of voting options available, Elections Manitoba can meet the needs of almost every eligible voter.

The following are specific accessibility provisions in the EA and the EFA:

- Voting places must be accessible to people with physical disabilities. This includes election day voting places and advance voting places. Because each returning office is also a voting place, the office itself must be accessible. (EA sec. 103(3), 125(6))
- Voting with a Braille ballot template: Elections Manitoba prints Braille ballot templates and Braille lists of candidates for all voting places. This allows people who are blind to vote with a regular ballot and without assistance. (EA sec. 118(1) and (2))
- Voter requiring assistance: A voter may bring someone with them to help them mark the ballot. The person must be at least 18 years old and must take an oath. Alternately, the voting officer may help the voter. (EA sec. 119(1))
- Moving ballot box (curbside voting): If a voter can't enter a voting station because of a disability, the voting officer can bring the ballot box outside to them. (EA sec. 121(1))



- Homebound voting: If a voter can't leave his or her home because of a disability, he or she can apply to vote at home. The voter's caregiver may also vote this way. For homebound voters, a voting officer brings the ballot to the voter's home. (EA sec. 151(1))
- Separate voting area for multiple residence of fewer than 100 units: The returning officer may establish a separate voting area for an apartment, condominium or other multiple residence with fewer than 100 units, where the majority of residents are seniors or persons with disabilities. This allows the residents to vote without leaving the building. (EA sec. 64 (5.1))
- Institutional Voting: The returning officer must set up voting stations for patients and residents of health care facilities. (EA sec. 137(1))
- Co-located facilities: A returning officer may extend an institutional voting station in a health care facility to include an adjoining facility or residence where seniors or persons with disabilities live. (EA sec. 137(1.1))
- Candidates with a disability:
  - Any reasonable disability-related expenses incurred by a candidate to allow him or her to campaign in an election are not considered election expenses. In other words, they are not counted towards the candidate's election spending limit. (EFA sec. 50 (3.6))
  - Candidates are reimbursed for all reasonable disability-related expenses incurred during an election period, as long as the candidate receives 5% or more of the valid votes in his or her electoral division. The expenses must be over and above any expenses he or she would normally incur. (EFA sec. 74 (2))
- Plain language:
  - *The Elections Act* was re-written in plain language in 2008.
  - *The Election Financing Act* was re-organized and re-written in plain language in 2013.

**b. Policies/Practices of Elections Manitoba arising from the legislation or developed to enhance accessibility:**

**VOTING:**

- Accessibility checklist: As part of their election preparation, all returning officers must complete an accessibility checklist for every voting place in their electoral division. For the 2019 general election, only two voting places out of 900 did not fully meet the accessibility requirements.<sup>1</sup>
- In addition to the Braille ballot templates, Elections Manitoba provides large print lists of candidates to voters with low vision.
- Elections Manitoba arranges for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters to assist voters with registration and voting. This service is provided at no cost to the voter.
- Easy-grip pencils are available at all voting stations.
- A writing pad is available at all voting stations to assist with communication.
- The font on write-in ballots has been enlarged and changed to make them easier to read.
- Voters are allowed to use their mobile devices to assist them with voting, e.g. if they have an application on their device that helps them read the ballot.
- Voters may bring service animals with them into the voting place.
- Parking designated for voters with disabilities

**COMMUNICATIONS:**

- Question & Answer Book prepared for election period includes sections on accessibility options for voters. This book is used by all headquarters and returning office staff to easily access information on specific topics.

<sup>1</sup> In one case, the doorway closest to the voting stations didn't meet standards. In the other, staff needed to assist voters using the elevator and on two occasions, the staff were not in the immediate area.



- Elections Manitoba website includes information on accessibility options for voters.
- Print advertising during an election includes information about the homebound voting option. The information is also publicized in our media relations campaign, through social media and in the Voter's Guide, which is distributed at various locations throughout the province.
- Elections Manitoba is reviewing all existing public materials to ensure they are in plain language. Any new documents created for the public will be written in plain language.
- Elections Manitoba regularly consults with the Disabilities Issues Office on accessibility information and practices

### **RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING:**

- Returning officer training includes a section on assisting voters with a disability. The section provides advice on how best to assist voters with specific types of disabilities, while emphasizing respect and the need to safeguard the rights of all voters.
- Employment equity policy and procedure are in place for recruitment of returning officers and assistant returning officers.
- Elections Manitoba complies with the Government of Manitoba employment equity policy and procedure for recruitment of all permanent staff.
- Accessible entrance, lowered front counter in reception area, accessible washrooms and meeting rooms at Elections Manitoba's headquarters.



## **PART V. Accessibility consultation, May 31, 2017**

Elections Manitoba hosted a consultation for disabilities organizations to share an early stage of this plan and seek their feedback. Participants were asked for their comments and ideas on three specific areas:

- Accessible customer service
- Accessible information and communications
- Accessible voting opportunities

Thank you to the following community agencies and individuals for your valuable input:

- Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre: Noella Gentes
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)/Vision Loss Rehabilitation Manitoba: Leonard Furber, Joanne Fabian, Cliff Diakiw
- Deaf Centre Manitoba: Sheila Montney, Doug Momotiuk
- Disabilities Issues Office: Colleen Watters
- E-Quality Communication Centre of Excellence: Shaina Dumont, Brenda Rutherford
- MNP: Jason Ducharme, Caroline Quinn
- Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society of Canada, Manitoba Division: Ken Schachtay
- Inclusion Winnipeg: Janet Forbes
- Society for Manitobans with Disabilities: Heather Hiscock

The consultation was a positive, open and constructive dialogue. Participants advised Elections Manitoba, in developing our plan, it is important to consider a wide range of disabilities resulting in unique needs. They also stressed the importance of increasing awareness of the many voting opportunities already available to eliminate barriers to voting. Comments and observations can be grouped into several key themes or recommendations:

## **INCREASED AND MORE EFFECTIVE TRAINING OF FRONTLINE STAFF**

Participants in the consultation said there was a need for front-line staff to have a better understanding of the types of accessibility barriers and the importance of respect, patience, listening and dignity. Suggestions included asking, “Do you need assistance with anything?” and then listening attentively to the response as an effective way to support voters with disabilities. They also stressed that it was important that staff be aware of the wide variety and range of disabilities, including less obvious disabilities, like “unseen” cognitive disabilities, in addition to the more obvious physical disabilities. Participants also emphasized the importance of ensuring that customer service training is delivered by individuals/ organizations with expertise.



## **BETTER PROMOTION AND AWARENESS OF EXISTING SERVICES**

Many participants shared that they were not aware of the full range of services currently offered by Elections Manitoba to reduce barriers. They also suggested that disabilities organizations could be effective partners in spreading awareness of voting opportunities and services provided by Elections Manitoba. All participants expressed their willingness to help communicate to their own communities. They also offered to provide resources, research and additional feedback to Elections Manitoba on specific disabilities and how to reduce barriers.

## **USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND OTHER COMMUNICATION SUPPORTS**

Participants shared information on existing technologies that could easily enhance the accessibility of elections, including video calling, texting and screen readers. We were made aware of a new service developed by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), called Video Relay Service (VRS), which enables people with hearing or speech disabilities who use sign language to communicate with voice telephone users using Internet-based videoconferencing.

Others commented on the need to make many different options available for communication, noting, for example, that people with similar disabilities may not use the same communication methods. Many noted the importance of clear directional and informational signage that uses a combination of verbal and pictorial messages, as well as staff positioned at entry points and along the way to a voting place.

The responses and comments provided by participants have been carefully considered and many have been incorporated into this plan.

## **PART VI. Highlights of accomplishments since 2017 accessibility plan**

- Partnered with Society for Manitobans with Disabilities (SMD) to make accessible customer service training videos available to all permanent and election staff.
  - Training has been provided to all permanent staff.
  - Training is now part of new employee orientation.
  - Training was provided to all returning officers, assistant returning officers and voting officials for the 2019 general election (over 8,000)
- Included closed captioning in television ad for 2019 general election



- Partnered with disabilities organization to provide information to Manitobans on voting options and services for voters with disabilities legislation and regulations
- Developed new policies for accessible customer service, including a feedback process for customer concerns
- Commissioned a post-election survey to gather feedback on the experience of voters with disabilities in the recent election. Survey is being distributed through disabilities organizations.

## **Part VII. Outreach for the 2019 general election:**

- Partnered with disability organizations to spread information to the different communities about accessibility services and voting options available during the election. Through this partnership, we distributed over 1,500 print copies as well as digital versions to 17 disabilities organizations in Manitoba.
- Partnered with Democratic Engagement Exchange, United Way Winnipeg and the City of Winnipeg to provide Vote PopUp training to community groups in Winnipeg. Aimed at reaching people who may face barriers to voting, Vote PopUp is a tool to increase community members' involvement in Canada's democracy and ensure that all voices are heard in the electoral process. Elections Manitoba provided support and materials to community organizations wanting to run their own Vote PopUps leading up to the provincial and federal elections.
- Partnered with E-Quality Communication Centre Of Excellence (ECCOE) to provide ASL interpretation service to voters at Deaf Centre Manitoba on election day.
- Partnered with Vision Impaired Resource Network (VIRN) to produce our brochure on accessibility services and voting options in Braille. Braille brochures were provided to every returning office.
- Participated in an election kick-off event hosted by Disability Matters: Hosted a booth to provide accessibility information for the election to event attendees.

# PART VIII. Existing Barriers

## ATTITUDINAL

- Lack of knowledge/awareness among staff of range of barriers that exist and how to support accommodations
- Lack of knowledge/awareness among some staff about accessibility legislation and regulations
- Lack of knowledge/awareness among some staff about accessibility legislation and regulations

Elections Manitoba has been addressing the knowledge gap through ongoing training and will continue to do so.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

- Most forms and publications not readily available in multiple formats
- Some forms not written in plain language
- Not all staff aware of appropriate communication methods and accessible customer service practices for people with disabilities

Existing forms that are revised and new forms that are developed are written in plain language. Elections Manitoba's brochure with information on voting services and options for people with disabilities was available in multiple, including braille.

## TECHNOLOGICAL

- Website is not accessible to all. Does not meet WCAG 2.0 standards for web accessibility.

A website accessibility audit is planned for 2020, with a plan to meet WCAG standards by the end of the year.

## **SYSTEMIC**

- Lack of knowledge among staff on the options available for voting
- Lack of policy to ensure training addresses needs of persons with disabilities

Ongoing partnership with disabilities organizations to communicate this information is one of the ways we are addressing this challenge.

## **PHYSICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL**

- Not every voting location is fully physically accessible; however, as was noted at the consultation, it's important to balance physical accessibility with convenience for the larger population, especially in smaller communities where the most central location may not have complete accessibility.

Other voting options can offset gaps in physical accessibility of voting places. For example, curbside voting, homebound voting and absentee voting do not require voters to enter a voting place.

## **PART IX. Priority Areas**

- a. Ensure that all voters are able to participate in the democratic process in a manner that is fair and respectful.
- b. Ensure staff understand all options available to voters with a disability
- c. Ensure staff understand different types of barriers and how to support accommodations, within existing election legislation
- d. Ensure staff know of how to communicate respectfully with and assist people with disabilities
- e. Ensure staff are trained to provide service in a manner that is fair and respectful to people with disabilities.
- f. Ensure policies are in place to support the above priorities
- g. Ensure all policies and training are documented
- h. Ensure awareness of and compliance with standards as they come into effect.

## PART X. Policies

Elections Manitoba is guided by many of the same policies developed by the Civil Service Commission and in use throughout the Manitoba Government. These include:

- Manitoba Policy on Access to Government Publications, Events and Services
- Reasonable Accommodation Policy
- Employment Equity Policy

Elections Manitoba's mandate is to ensure free, fair and accessible elections so all eligible voters in Manitoba have the opportunity to cast their ballot. The legislative framework for the operations of Elections Manitoba comes from three key pieces of legislation: *The Elections Act* (EA), *The Election Financing Act* (EFA) and *The Referendum Act*. Other pieces of legislation that ensure accessibility to elections in Manitoba include:

- *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* which guarantees that every eligible voter has the right to vote
- *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act*, which provides that individuals should have barrier-free access to place and events that are generally available in the community, as well as to those things that will give them equality of opportunity and outcome

Many policies, practices and measures already in place at Elections Manitoba respond to the requirements outlined in the customer service regulation. The following accessible customer service policy has been developed and will be in effect in the coming months and leading up to the next general election. The policy addresses voting opportunities, interactions with voters and general communications with voters.

- 1. Communications:** Communication with persons with disabilities must be done in a manner that takes barriers into account:
  - Advertising and other informational materials are produced in a variety of formats, incorporating the principles of plain language use and design that enhances clarity of the message.

- Election information is conveyed using a variety of methods, e.g. print, radio, television, online, etc. to ensure that minimize barriers to communication.
  - Voters may, on request, ASL interpretation for the purposes of adding a voter to the voters list or casting a ballot
  - Elections Manitoba promotes accessible voting opportunities in its advertising and communications campaigns as well as in collaboration with disabilities organizations.
  - Elections Manitoba makes reasonable efforts to ensure that, when communicating with a person who self-identifies as being disabled by a barrier, that the communication is done in a manner that takes into account the barrier.
2. **Assistive Devices:** Individuals who use assistive devices and other supports, including personal mobile devices, may use them inside voting places and behind the voting screen, and at any other location where Elections Manitoba business is conducted, where permitted by law. Voters are advised that care should be taken to preserve the secrecy of the vote, as per sec. 123(1) of the EA.
  3. **Support persons:** Individuals who are accompanied by a support person may have access to that person when casting their ballot, after the support person signs an oath. This is guaranteed under sec. 118 of the EA.
  4. **Service animals:** Individuals who use service animals are allowed to be accompanied by the service animal into voting places and behind the voting screen and at any other location where Elections Manitoba business is conducted.
  5. **Built environment:** Voting places must be accessible with clear and unobstructed hallways and accessible features, such as automatic entrances, doors and ramps, where available. Ramps may be supplied by Elections Manitoba to eliminate a potential barrier in a voting place.
  6. **Feedback process:** Members of the public may provide feedback on accessible customer service through a variety of methods: in person, by phone or email. Feedback provided to a returning office will be forwarded to headquarters by returning office staff. An initial response is provided within one week, with any follow-up provided within a reasonable period of time. Any resulting actions are documented.



- 7. Information about accessible customer service policies, processes and practices:** Returning offices and voting places will display information about accessible voting opportunities and options. Information will direct members of the public to the Elections Manitoba website for information on customer service policies, processes and practices.
- 8. Training:** Elections Manitoba provides accessible customer service training to election officials, returning office staff and permanent staff. Election officials receive training prior to taking on their responsibilities and returning office and permanent staff receive training within a reasonable time of taking on their responsibilities with Elections Manitoba.
- 9. Public events:** Any public event held by Elections Manitoba is to be accessible by ensuring the following:
  - Notice of the event is to be provided in a manner that is accessible to persons with disabilities.
  - Events are to be held in a location that is accessible, or where this is not possible, other methods must be in place to ensure participation.
  - Reasonable accommodation will be provided on request for those wishing to participate.
  - Notice will be given that people with disabilities may request supports or accommodation.



# PART XI. Identifying Initiatives and Actions

1. GENERAL		
Initiatives/Actions	Expected Outcomes	Status
Provide training to all HQ staff on the <i>Accessibility for Manitobans Act</i> , including customer service standard regulation and other standards to be developed	Increased awareness among staff to ensure understanding of EM's requirements under the legislation	Ongoing
Review manuals and training materials to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. ensure all field staff are aware of accessibility options for voting</li> <li>b. incorporate customer service standard</li> <li>c. increase awareness of how to communicate with/assist voters with disabilities</li> </ul>	Better accessibility and service for voters in future elections and byelections	Complete
Continue to document processes that ensure voting is accessible and make those processes available to the public in plain language	Increased public awareness of accessibility measures in place to facilitate voting for people with disabilities	Ongoing

## 2. CUSTOMER SERVICE

Initiatives/Actions	Expected Outcomes	Status
Review voting place accessibility checklist to ensure criteria are up to date. Continue to seek feedback from disabilities organizations on the criteria. <sup>1</sup>	Remaining current with evolving accessibility needs of the public to ensure best possible accessibility to voting	To be completed in 2020.
Use accessibility checklist when preparing for Boundaries Commission public consultation	An accessible consultation process	Complete: Checklist was used in determining locations for public hearings.
Ensure election staff receive customer service training that creates awareness of the range of disabilities, the unique needs that result, and the importance of awareness, respect, listening and dignity	A more positive voting experience for people with disabilities	Completed in 2018 for permanent staff and now incorporated in staff orientation process. Completed for returning officers and assistant returning officers in the 2019 general election.

1 Considerations mentioned in the consultation included:

- Voting places on bus routes
- Sidewalks, parking lots and voting place clear of snow and other debris
- Clear signage for wheelchair accessible entrance
- Accessible signage, pictorial plus verbal
- Good lighting
- Ample seating available

Review customer feedback process to ensure there is a mechanism to let customers know that feedback has been received and is being considered	Transparency and accountability in customer relations	Complete: Process and policy in place
With the assistance of Manitoba disabilities organizations, develop and conduct a post-election survey of their clients' experience during the election	Better understanding of needs and experiences of voters with disabilities	In progress
Investigate the possibility of offering a live chat option during the election period as an additional method to provide feedback and ask questions about the election	Additional method of customer feedback	Delayed until 43 <sup>rd</sup> general election
Following a general election, review customer service feedback received to inform future planning for prevention and removal of barriers	Effective use of resources to prevent and remove barriers for greatest customer service impact	In progress – based on feedback received during the election and survey being conducted
Make large/easy-grip pencils available at voting places for voters to mark their ballots	Greater ease for voters to mark their ballot	Complete: Available for 2019 general election

### 3. VOTING OPPORTUNITIES

Initiatives/Actions	Expected Outcomes	Status
Examine the feasibility of having (a) designated voting station(s) with specialized help for those with disabilities	More convenience and access to voters with a wide variety of disabilities	Reviewed for the 2019 general election <sup>1</sup>
Introduce a recommendation to extend the absentee/ write-in ballot opportunity to people with disabilities who are unable to go to a voting place		Complete: No legislative change was required; voters using the homebound option may mail their ballots. (EA 152(3)). This was implemented and promoted during 2019 general election

### 4. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Initiatives/Actions	Expected Outcomes	Status
Continue to review communications materials to ensure they are written in plain language	Increased understanding of election processes, requirements and voting opportunities for all stakeholders	Ongoing

<sup>1</sup> As there was not a consensus on the need for and/or benefit of a separate voting location among participants at the consultation in 2016, and because services for voters with disabilities are available at most voting places, the decision was made for 2019 not to proceed with this. The option will be reviewed for future elections.



Review directional and way-finding signage at voting locations to ensure it is clear and easy to understand. Continue to place staff at entrances to voting places so they can direct voters in the building	Improved access to voting place.	Ongoing
Include close captioning in election TV commercials for 2020 and any other widely viewed public videos produced by EM	Better awareness of voting opportunities and election information	Complete
Circulate information to all staff on creating accessible documents	More pro-active approach to developing documents that are accessible, rather than responding to requests for a document in an alternate format	Ongoing
Ensure WCAG compliance for voting opportunities sections of the Elections Manitoba website	Better user experience for people with disabilities; better access to information for voters with disabilities	Postponed: A WCAG audit will be completed of 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> level pages of the website in 2020.
Partner with disabilities organizations to inform disabilities communities about accessibility services and voting opportunities	More voters with disabilities can vote more easily	Ongoing. This was carried out for the 2019 general election.

Keep registered parties and candidates informed about Elections Manitoba's efforts to increase accessibility, e.g. provide accessibility plan to them, and encourage them to make their materials and events more accessible	Better accessibility in all aspects of the democratic/political process	Ongoing. This was carried out for the 2019 general election.
Develop policy to allow for voters with disabilities to use their mobile devices to assist them with voting	Allow more voters to cast their votes independently, without the assistance of friend or voting officer	Complete: A policy was developed for the 2019 general election and provided to election officials.

## 5. EMPLOYMENT

Initiatives/Actions	Expected Outcomes	Status
<p>Ensure deliverables for employment standard are completed on schedule:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Emergency response planning</li> <li>b. Reasonable accommodation measures, policies and practices</li> </ul>	<p>A safer work environment for employees with disabilities.</p> <p>A more inclusive workplace that is responsive to the specific needs of employees with disabilities</p>	<p>We will be in compliance with the Accessibility Standard for Employment by the deadline.</p>



**For more information, contact:**

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