

Submission to Standing Committee: Request to Modify Voting Process

Elections Manitoba (EM) is recommending modifications to the voting process to make it more efficient while maintaining the integrity of the vote. Accordingly, as set out in *The Elections Act*, s. 28.1, EM is providing details of the proposed changes and respectfully requests a meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs within 60 days. The proposed changes meet public expectations to use technology efficiently and maintain the security and integrity of paper ballots.

Proposed Changes

EM is proposing three process changes. Two involve advance voting: streamlining advance voting procedures, allowing for real time strike-off; and using new voting book format. The third change is a combined pre-printed voting book/list for use on election day that has the preliminary and revised voters list in one place, and includes the names of advance voters already struck from the list.

1. Advance Voting – Electronic Strike-off

During advance voting, bar codes on voter information cards (VICs) would be scanned, the voter found on the electronic voters list, issued a ballot and electronically struck from the voters list. Candidates would receive voting information from the returning office at set times via email. Headquarters would provide non-resident advance voting information to the registered parties.

Benefits:

- Electronic look up and strike off is fast, accurate and immediately shows all system users that a particular voter has voted.
- Reduces the lengthy hours election officials work to ensure voters' names are struck off the list before advance voting continues the next day.
- Reduces the potential for errors in processing the voter and in accurately tracking who has voted and should be struck off the voting list.

2. New Voting Book Format

The advance voting book would be re-formatted to allow for labels to be printed and pasted into the voting book, eliminating the need to hand write information. For non-resident advance voting, a second label would be printed for the certificate envelope.

Benefits:

- Streamlines a multi-step process where a voter's name is entered three different times by hand.
- Speeds up the processing time for voters.

3. Combine Voting Book and Voters List

On election day, a pre-printed voting book would be produced, including the struck-off names of those who voted during advance voting and those who used special voting opportunities such as homebound voting and absentee ballots. The voting book also serves as the voters list combining names from the preliminary and revised lists, and the struck off names of advance voters.

Benefits:

- Saves time and reduces potential errors as voters only have to be searched on one list, instead of three different documents.
- Advance voters already struck from the list.

Section 28 lists the objectives that a change in the voting process must meet, and the proposed changes meet the objectives:

	s. 28.1(2) (a) Improve voting process for voters	s. 28.1(2)(b) Achieve administrative efficiencies	s.28.1(2)(c) Maintain integrity of voting process
Advance – electronic strike off of voters	√	√	√
Advance – new voting book format	√	√	√
Election day – combined voters lists and book with advance voter names already struck	√	√	√

Background

EM is using technology to build and maintain a permanent voters list, as set out in amendments made to *The Elections Act* in November 2017. This technology allows EM to propose three changes to improve the voting process. The proposed changes also reflect EM’s strategic priorities of service and innovation.

- Service: advance voting opportunities are increasingly attractive to voters. Advance voting by residents in their own electoral division or voting anywhere as a non-resident voter accounted for 25 per cent of the vote in 2016, or 110,332 votes. That number is expected to grow. Updating the voters list efficiently and accurately requires a different approach than in 2016.
- Innovation: anecdotally, election officials and voters have expressed surprise with the manual, handwritten processes used for voting. Expectations of voters and staff have evolved, with the use of technology increasingly accepted. EM is looking to use technology strategically to ensure implementation costs are reasonable the voting process integrity is maintained.

The fundamentals will still apply: each voter receives a paper ballot, marks their ballot behind a privacy screen and returns their ballot to the ballot box. Not all changes will be fully implemented in all electoral divisions. The focus will be on high demand areas with reliable Internet services. In addition, EM continues to work through technology details and logistics to ensure the changes are implemented smoothly.

Byelection Test Results

During the recent St. Boniface byelection, Elections Manitoba ran a parallel process to test the advance electronic strike-off process and the use of a pre-printed voting book while still using the traditional paper-based methods set out in legislation. Former returning officers and assistant returning officers participated in the parallel process. Some key findings:

- The technology was easy to use.
- Technology sped up the process of finding voter's names.
- Technology Increased accuracy as compared to the multi-step manual/paper process.
- Clear benefits could be seen in striking off names in real time instead of the phone calls and other processes to update the voters list overnight and in the early morning hours during advance voting.

Recommendation

The proposed modifications fit within the legislation. Specifically, 28.1(2) sets out three objectives for any proposed modifications:

(a) Improve the voting process for voters: The proposed modifications will allow EM to process voters faster and efficiently.

(b) Achieve administrative efficiencies: The proposed modifications streamline processes and make better use of election officials' time, particularly during advance voting, by using technology.

(c) Maintain the integrity of the voting process: Secure technology is used to efficiently track voting and voters, while the traditional paper and pencil process is retained to mark ballots. The fundamentals remain in place.

The following recommendations are made to the Standing Committee:

- That the Standing Committee direct Elections Manitoba to modify the voting processes as noted in this submission for upcoming byelections and the 2020 general election.
- That the Standing Committee direct Elections Manitoba to report back on the results of applying these modifications for any byelections and the 2020 general election as noted in s 28.1(7).