

# Report to the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs

## Modifications to the Voting Process for the 42nd General Election

In January 2019 Elections Manitoba received approval from the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs to proceed with three modifications to the voting process following the steps set out in section 28.1 of *The Elections Act*. The following is a report back to the committee on how the modifications performed during the 42nd general election, as required by legislation. The changes were proposed to meet public expectations to use technology efficiently while maintaining the security and integrity of paper ballots.

### What Changed

Elections Manitoba made three process changes. Two involved advance voting: streamlining advance voting procedures, allowing for electronic strike-off; and using a new voting book format. The third change involved the production of a pre-printed book that combined the voting book and voters list



for use on election day. The book included the preliminary and revised voters lists and showed the names of advance, homebound and absentee voters already struck from the list.

### The Results

All three modifications were well received and performed well during the election. Feedback from voters and frontline voting officials was very positive. The objectives as set out in s. 28.1(2) were achieved:

1. Improve the voting process for voters: Using technology during advance voting sped up the process of voting and

reduced cumbersome and time-consuming manual processes.

2. Achieve administrative efficiencies: Using technology increased overall speed and efficiency, and reduced the potential for errors. Real-time information was useful for election officials and registered parties.
3. Maintain the integrity of the voting process: The selective use of technology addressed areas where administrative efficiencies were needed while maintaining the security and integrity of a single paper ballot for each voter.

## The Details

### Advance Voting Electronic Strike-Off and New Voting Book Format

These two modifications were implemented during advance voting from August 29, 2019 to September 5, 2019 at 194 locations out of 326 locations. The criteria for locations was:

1. All returning offices.
2. One other location in each electoral division where connectivity could be established.
3. Capacity of field staff in terms of training and ability to provide support
4. Anticipated voter turnout, particularly for non-resident voters.

Instead of searching through a paper list, staff found voters' names quickly in one of two ways: scanning the bar code on their voter information card or using the web-based voters list management system. This approach proved to be faster and more accurate in finding and processing voters. The electronic strike-off showed all system users that a voter had voted almost immediately.

Advance voting reports were provided daily to the registered parties in a digital format.

One report indicated all voters who had voted the previous day and where they had voted. In addition, a move report was provided indicating which voters had moved and changed addresses, the address and electoral division they had left where applicable, and their new address and electoral division.

The advance voting book was 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 was printed for the certificate envelope, again replacing the need to hand write.

Using the new voting book format and printing out labels for the booklet and certificate envelopes of non-resident voters was fast and provided more accurate and legible information.

### Combined Voting Book and Voters List for Election Day

Combining the preliminary and revised paper voting lists along with those who had voted in advance streamlined the process of voting on election day and reduced errors. The pre-printed books were prepared for each voting station and included the struck off names of those individuals who had voted in advance,

homebound or absentee. It meant that voting officials only had to go through one list instead of two or more.



*Printed labels replaced hand-written voter information in voting books.*

## Challenges

Overall the modified processes performed very well. There were a few challenges addressed during advance voting, including:

- **Connectivity issues:** use of technology requires a secure network that connects to the voters list and Elections Manitoba's internal databases. There were some challenges in finding and maintaining a robust enough signal in some areas of Winnipeg, in the north and in a few areas of rural Manitoba. All sites had the ability to revert to paper if there were difficulties.

*Solution: Elections Manitoba will continue to seek service providers and systems that provide robust and dependable signals.*

- **Adapting to technology:** a few election officials had some difficulty adapting to the use of technology. This number was relatively small. The majority understood and became quite comfortable in using the voters list management system during advance. The program is intuitive and easy to use.

*Solution: Training will be revised to give voting officials more time to get used to using the technology. Some minor adjustments have been made to the program to make it easier to use for Manitoba elections.*

- **Proper technology set-up:** The voting day set-up using technology takes a bit more time and requires attention to detail. A few sites were slow in getting up and running, but the majority were running quite smoothly within the first hour of advance voting.

*Solution: Training will emphasize the steps in properly setting up voting stations. In addition, in-house videos and detailed instructions will be provided and emphasized prior to use to help elections officials clearly understand the set-up process.*

## Recommendation

The modifications have been tested in a byelection and a full general election, and worked well in achieving the objectives set out in legislation.

It is therefore recommended that modifications be permanently enshrined in legislation through legislative amendments to *The Elections Act*.

It is further recommended that amendments should reflect the possibility of extending the technological modifications made in advance voting to election day, with review and approval of the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs.

It is recommended that Elections Manitoba work with Legislative Counsel in developing the amendments.

	s. 28.1(2) (a) Improve voting process for voters	Number 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 and voting book with advance voter names already struck off.	✓	✓	✓