

Information Guide

Working at a Federal Election





Overview

What is Inspire Democracy?

Inspire Democracy is an Elections Canada program. Elections Canada designed it to help people deliver workshops or information sessions about taking part in federal elections.

We created the program to:

- inform more people about taking part in the electoral process—whether by registering to vote, voting, running in an election as a **candidate** or working at an election
- make people more familiar with how voting works
- make voting **accessible** for people or groups who face **barriers** to voting

In this guide, you'll find information about the many jobs that we need to fill during an **election period**.

Elections Canada usually hires and pays 230,000–250,000 **election workers** during every general election to ensure it runs smoothly and fairly. There are many benefits to working at an election such as getting paid, helping to support Canada's democracy and meeting people in your community. Elections Canada aims to have all **polling stations** and **Elections Canada offices** reflect the diversity of Canada's communities. That means we are looking to hire more members of the following groups:

- youth (especially those aged 16 and 17)
- post-secondary students
- bilingual people who can provide service in both official languages
- people who speak a language other than the common official language in their riding
- First Nations people, Métis and Inuit
- people with disabilities

There are many different ways to work at a federal election. The various job types depend on whether you're working:



at an Elections Canada office



at a polling station

You are no longer required to work in the riding you live in. In other words, you can apply to work where you choose. Depending on the situation, Elections Canada may ask you to work in a neighbouring riding where there are not enough workers.

There are various paid positions available. Each job has its own roles and requirements, but they will all give you valuable experience, skills and networking opportunities as well as a better understanding of how voting works.

It's important to show up!

During the 2019 federal election, there were some issues with trained election workers not showing up for their shifts as well as not enough people applying to work in some ridings. Roughly 10,000 trained workers did not show up at their assigned polling station. These no-shows can have a big impact on [electors](#), especially in cases where advance notice was not given to the [returning officers](#).

When you don't show up for your shifts, it means that it may be difficult to open the polls, which makes it harder for people to vote. If there are not enough workers, a polling station will not open. It's important to honour your commitment as an election worker: your community is counting on you!

Who can work with us

To work at a federal election, you must:

- be a Canadian citizen¹
- be at least 16 years old
- be **impartial**: When hired, you must sign a [solemn declaration](#) to make official your impartiality when performing the office's duties. In doing so, you must refrain from: 1) taking part in any political activities from the beginning until the end of your work for Elections Canada; 2) working for any candidate or [political party](#) or going to any political events or meetings. While you're on duty, you can't show or wear material that says anything good or bad about a political party or candidate. This strict impartiality and non-partisanship are key since they strengthen the confidence of electors.

The following persons may **not** be appointed as poll workers:

- a federal minister or a member of the executive council of a province
- a member of the Senate or the [House of Commons](#)

- a member of the [legislature](#) of a province, the Council of the Northwest Territories or the Legislative Assembly of Yukon or Nunavut
- a judge or deputy judge of any superior court or any bankruptcy or insolvency court or, in Yukon and the Northwest Territories, a judge of the Supreme Court
- a person who was a candidate in the last general election or in a [by-election](#) held since the last general election in any riding across Canada
- a person who has served in Parliament in the session immediately before the election or in the session in progress at the time of the election
- a person who, within seven years before the proposed appointment, was found guilty of any offence under the [Canada Elections Act \(CEA\)](#)², the *Referendum Act*, or provincial legislation, according to paragraph 22(3)(f) of the CEA.

Calling all Canadians aged 16 and 17 years!

Working in a federal election is a great learning experience for students. Working at the polls will allow you to witness democracy first-hand, understand how the system works—and contribute as an active citizen. You'll be able to build your resumé and get paid (even for your training). Work is available on weekends, so it will not interfere with schooling. Simply ask the returning officer in your riding about working at the [advance polls](#).

Further, there are almost always extra jobs available on election night to count the advance and special ballots, or work in the office to help collect and organize all the materials being brought back from the polls.

¹ Canadian citizenship is required for election officers—that is, for all those who work at polling stations. Some positions at the Elections Canada office may not require Canadian citizenship.



A: Working at a federal election during the pandemic

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During a minority government, an election can be called at any time. If an election were to be called during the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, the next federal election would likely look and feel a bit different from the last one in 2019. Even in the midst of this crisis, the wheels of our democracy continue to turn. So, we need to make sure that we fill hundreds of thousands of election positions for the 44th federal general election. We know that election workers are the backbone of Canada's democracy. We need to ensure that we have enough people to make it happen.



B: Elections Canada office jobs

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Every **riding** (or electoral district) in Canada has an Elections Canada office, which opens when any general election or by-election is called. The returning officer for a riding works at the Elections Canada office along with the election workers who help plan, manage budgets and resources, revise electoral lists and communicate with the public.



C: Polling station jobs

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Working at a federal election during the pandemic

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Throughout these uncertain times, Elections Canada remains committed to maintaining the integrity of our electoral process and protecting the health and safety of all its participants. This includes electors, election workers, and candidates and their teams.

We want Canadians to feel safe about applying for a position that requires physical interactions with hundreds of electors during every shift.

For that to happen, we are taking the following measures in consultation with public health authorities:

- All precautions will be taken so workers maintain physical distance while at the polls to reduce exposure risk.
- Returning officers will find polling locations that offer better physical distancing options—this may mean bigger facilities or polls serving fewer people. There will be physical distancing and directional signage throughout the polling place.
- All poll workers will be provided with several non-medical masks. Workers may use their own masks, but these must be neutral in colour to follow the non-partisan rules.
- Election workers will be encouraged to frequently wash their hands and, when soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer and take other personal safety measures.
- Elections Canada will be equipping hand-sanitizing stations at entrances and exits and throughout the polling place and providing hand sanitizer stations for electors.
- Elections Canada will also be providing safety equipment to workers who serve electors. There will be safety barriers for those who sit at desks and face shields for those at entrances or doors or who move around.
- We will provide masks and single-use pencils to electors, as needed. Electors can also bring their own mask and pen or pencil.

- Elections Canada will reduce the number of workers at each polling station table from two to one. This will also reduce the number of potential interactions and allow for physical distancing between election workers.
- We will encourage all office workers at [Elections Canada offices](#) and poll workers to use self-assessment tools to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 and to stay home if they believe they have these symptoms.
- Poll workers will be cleaning workstations, door handles and common surfaces throughout the day.

Training will look different, too. Each returning officer will decide what works best under local circumstances, using a combination of in-class training that respects physical distancing, remote training by teleconference, self-study with or without Internet access and on-the-job supervision and support. Using these options, we limit the number of in-person interactions. Where classrooms are used, the health measures described above will be in place.

To provide workers and participants with a safe learning environment, returning officers will follow protocols and directives that Elections Canada has established after consultation with public health authorities.

For more information on Elections Canada pandemic measures, read on [here](#).



Elections Canada office jobs

Every riding (or electoral district) in Canada has an Elections Canada office, which opens when any general election or by-election is called. The returning officer for a riding works at the Elections Canada office along with the election workers who help plan, manage budgets and resources, revise electoral lists and communicate with the public.

When you work at an Elections Canada office, you work for the entire election period (36 to 50 days before an election) between 7.5 and 12 hours a day, including weekends. The number of days you work will depend on the job.

This office is a busy place during an election period and can at times be stressful. Election workers prepare everything people need to vote:

- register and update electors' names and addresses on the list of electors
- help electors vote by special ballot
- manage paperwork and election materials
- answer questions from the public

Jobs at an Elections Canada office include:

- assistant returning officer
- service point supervisor
- service agent
- service centre clerk
- financial officer
- training officer
- electoral material coordinator
- automation coordinator
- receptionist
- office clerk
- office coordinator
- office messenger
- recruitment supervisor
- recruitment officer
- safety officer
- community relations officer

Spotlight on community relations officers

The Community Relations Officer Program is a key part of Elections Canada's outreach activities. Its goal is to provide information to assist electors who face barriers to registering and voting such as:

- youth
- First Nations people, Métis, Inuit
- seniors
- ethnocultural communities
- electors with disabilities
- electors who are homeless
- official language minority electors

During each federal election, returning officers are asked to evaluate, within their electoral districts, the needs of these groups of electors. The returning officer decides on the appointment of the appropriate number of community relations officers to liaise with electors in these groups.

Community relations officers engage with electors to remove **barriers** to registration and voting and to improve knowledge and understanding of the election. Community relations officers share information on when, where and the ways to register and vote. They make voting as accessible as possible. To find out with which groups the community relations officer works in your community, call your Elections Canada office (during an election only).

As a result of COVID-19 safety and security measures, community relations officers will be working from home. No in-person events will be planned. Instead, Elections Canada will provide these officers with a suite of digital information products to be shared with key contacts from the target groups to disseminate to their members. They will also engage in phone contact with community leaders or use a virtual platform (Skype, Zoom or WhatsApp) to do so.

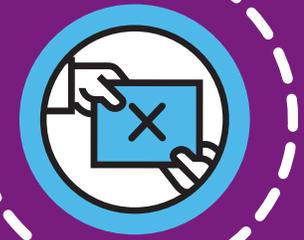
If you're interested in being a community relations officer, you need experience in building good community relationships and in working with different communities. You must know about the groups' customs, cultures and sensitivities and have established contacts with organizations that offer services to them.



How to apply

Check the Elections Canada Employment [page](#) or reach out to your Elections Canada office (during an election only). Returning officers hire office staff both before and after the election is called.

Polling station jobs



There are election workers at each polling station who work directly with the public.

When you work at a polling station, you work either:

- on election day
- at the advance polls (the Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday one week before election day)

On election day, the shift begins up to an hour before the polls open and ends when the election workers have counted the last ballots—usually a 14-hour shift (or more).

When you work at a polling station, you work closely with the public. Polling stations can at times be busy, but you'll always have a team working with you.

From the information officer, who directs electors to the appropriate table, to the deputy returning officer, who handles the ballots, election workers at polling stations make it possible for electors to vote in an orderly way.

Jobs at a polling station include:

- deputy returning officer
- information officer
- registration officer
- central poll supervisor

Want to learn more about each job?

Read on [here](#).



How to apply

Fill out this [online form](#) anytime. Note, however, that most jobs are filled only during the election period.



How does the hiring of election workers proceed?

Whether you're working at an Elections Canada office or a polling station, the hiring of election workers follows the rules in the [CEA](#).

More specifically, for poll workers at the polling station, the following applies:

1

Recruitment officers, on behalf of the returning officers, do the hiring of poll workers in their riding.

2

Potential workers can apply in the appropriate employment section of the [Elections Canada's website](#).

3

The recruitment officer conducts phone interviews.

4

If the interview is successful, the recruitment officer assigns the applicant to an online training session based on their position and, if applicable, to a place.

5

After the training session, applicants sign a solemn declaration and are officially hired to work either during the advance polls or on election day.

6

The returning officer evaluates how well you're doing, both during the training session and on the job.

The hiring process may vary for jobs at Elections Canada offices. Check the Elections Canada Employment [page](#) or reach out to your Elections Canada office (during an election only).



How does the training proceed?

We train all polling station election workers before they start to work.

No matter what your poll worker job is, you'll get:

- a session delivered by a skilled trainer or through self-study materials—though you will not be able to choose which format. All in-class training will respect pandemic guidelines.

This training time is paid and takes place in the riding where you'll work.

Training can usually be scheduled during the day or evening or on weekends.

During your training session, depending on which position you are hired for, you can expect to:

- do hands-on practice (using examples of common situations); we'll provide worksheets and materials just for your use
- receive a guidebook, which includes all the information you need to do your job well
- watch videos and read short explanations
- take quizzes
- make a [solemn declaration](#)

Before working, you will make a solemn declaration, likely during a classroom session. If your training is in another format, you'll make the declaration at a different time.

Training may vary for other jobs at Elections Canada offices.



Glossary

Accessible	Something anyone can do or use, even if it might be harder for some because of a disability, poor health, poverty, low literacy skills or other barriers.
Advance polls	Polling stations that are open on advance voting days. They're one way electors can vote before election day.
Barriers	Things that make it more difficult for you to vote.
By-election	An election that concerns only one riding. It only happens when the riding's member of Parliament leaves the job between federal general elections.
Candidate	A person who is running for an elected position.
Election period	The time between the call of an election and election day. A federal election period lasts between 36 and 50 days.
Election worker	Someone who works for Elections Canada at a local office or at the polls during a federal election.
Elections Canada office	The Elections Canada office of a riding. Every riding has at least one. It opens when a federal election is called and closes after election day. It is where the returning officer and their staff work. It's open to the public.
Elector	Someone who can vote in the election.
Electoral event	An event where Canadian electors vote. It can be a federal election, a by-election or a referendum.
House of Commons	The institution made up of 338 elected members of Parliament.
Impartial	Not biased—that is, treating or affecting all equally.
List of electors	A list of all Canadian electors with their name, address and date of birth. The list is updated at the start of an election period.
Member of Parliament	The elected candidate for a federal riding.
Partisan activity	Any activity that is connected to or supports political parties. Partisan activities include sharing the slogans and images of political parties and conspicuously using the main colour of a political party.
Political parties	Groups that support particular candidates in an election. They usually share similar values, priorities and a vision for Canada.

Polling station	A public building where people go to vote in a federal election. It's often a school or a community centre.
Poll worker	An election worker who works at a polling station.
Provincial or territorial legislature	A group of people elected to pass laws for a province or territory.
Returning officer	The person who is responsible for all federal electoral events in their riding. Returning officers are appointed by Canada's Chief Electoral Officer.
Riding	Also called an "electoral district" or a "constituency." A geographic area of the country that can be a community, region or town. A member of Parliament represents it in the House of Commons.
Solemn declaration	A document signed by an election worker by which they solemnly affirm or swear that certain facts are true and that they will respect some work-related obligations when hired by a returning officer.
Special ballot	A way to vote by mail.
