

2024–2030 Strategic Plan

Accelerating Excellence





Elections Ontario
is building
modern voting services
that put the needs of
Ontarians first.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



I was appointed to my role as the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario in 2008. At that time, the electoral process looked much like it had for the last century, yet the expectations and needs of Ontarians had shifted considerably. People were becoming more comfortable with using technology, and the need for accessibility had become more urgent. It was clear to me then, as it is today, that to maintain the trust of electors, we must respond to their changing needs.

This understanding drove my first set of proposed changes, *Modernizing Ontario's Electoral Process: Recommendations for Legislative Change*, published in 2009. It marked the beginning of our journey to modernize the way we administer elections in Ontario. I liken it to a road trip, with our successive strategic plans serving as the maps to guide us forward to our destination. We have encountered roadblocks along the way that have altered timelines, changed our course and led to new adventures. These forced us to take unavoidable detours, but we have always delivered fair, transparent, and accessible elections.

I am proud of what we have achieved over the last 16 years — from introducing technology at polling stations to modernizing our workforce and creating engaging school programs that educate the next generation of voters. Most recently, we developed a province-wide program to enhance the quality of the list of provincial electors. These efforts have allowed us to improve efficiency, update the technology we rely on, forge stronger partnerships with other electoral management bodies (EMBs) around the world, and build a reputation as a trusted voice on elections in Canada.

We have achieved this by carefully balancing the need for innovation with accountability — because there is simply too much at stake otherwise.

The 2024-2030 strategic plan marks the next step in our journey. As our longest plan to date, it provides the flexibility to make meaningful progress between fixed-date election cycles. Building on the previous plan, we'll focus on becoming even more elector-centered by better aligning our back-office operations with the shifting realities in the field. We will enhance career pathways to nurture high-performing teams and support a smoother succession, adopt a more rigorous approach to risk management, and strengthen our reputation as a trusted authority in electoral administration in this country.

This is a plan that responds to the changing realities of the electoral landscape, empowers us to develop innovative solutions to new challenges, and reflects our ambition to build modern services that put the needs of Ontarians first.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Essensa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Essensa

Chief Electoral Officer

VISION

Build, deliver, and support services that put the needs of Ontarians first.

MISSION

Uphold the integrity and accessibility of the electoral process and be ready to administer elections in an efficient, fair, and impartial manner.

VALUES

Integrity

We believe in administering transparent processes that maintain integrity and the democratic rights of all electors.

Fairness

We believe in administering non-partisan processes and treating all electors equitably.

Accessibility

We believe the electoral process must be open and accessible, removing physical and systemic barriers that impede full participation in the electoral process.

Innovation

We believe that, in administering the electoral process, we must respond to changing needs and encourage innovation.

Respect

We believe in recognizing and celebrating diversity, building collaborative working relationships based on mutual respect, fairness and equality, and demonstrating courteous conduct and communication in all that we do.

Accountability

We believe in creating an organizational culture where we understand and live by clear principles of professional and ethical conduct.

Efficiency

We believe in encouraging efficiency in everything we do, including in the efficient use of public funds and resources with which we have been entrusted to deliver high-quality services for Ontarians.



We made a promise to Ontarians to make voting easier by putting their needs first.

This commitment has driven every step of our modernization journey.

We have evolved from paper lists to e-Poll books, from hand-counted ballots to vote tabulators, and launched Canada's first-of-its-kind mobile app to keep voters informed.

But modernization extends beyond technology. We've standardized processes, streamlined operations where appropriate, and recommended legislative changes to level the playing field for political entities while enhancing transparency for voters. Throughout, we have built an electoral management body (EMB) that is flexible, adaptable, and ready to respond to a changing world.

This transformation required us to fundamentally rethink how we operate. We have taken a measured and principled approach to innovation, balancing continuous improvement with an unwavering commitment to the values of democracy: secrecy and privacy of the ballot, fairness and transparency, adaptability and integrity.

Maintaining this balance has not always been easy, and the challenges are growing.

More voters are finding it harder to distinguish fact from fiction. The risk of major cyberattacks targeting critical voting infrastructure is increasing, while democratic systems worldwide face unprecedented pressure, and the growing frequency of natural disasters adds uncertainty to on-the-ground election logistics. At the same time, artificial intelligence (AI), with its potential benefits and risks, is becoming an integral part of the electoral process, requiring a proactive and thoughtful response.

Despite these uncertainties, Elections Ontario remains a trusted EMB in Canada — a view shared by 81 per cent of eligible voters in the 2022 general election.



We are now preparing for the future.

Our 2024–2030 strategic plan outlines the priorities and strategies that will guide our work over the next six years. Built on the successes of our modernization efforts, the plan was developed in partnership with our senior management and executive teams and responds to feedback from internal teams, stakeholders, and Ontarians. It is both practical and ambitious, balancing the need to safeguard electoral integrity with responsible innovation.

81
per cent

of electors had trust in Elections Ontario during the 2022 general election.

75
per cent

of electors believe that false information had an impact on the outcome of the 2022 general election to some extent.

89
per cent

of those who voted in the 2022 general election chose to vote in person at a poll.



A large, white, stylized 'X' logo is mounted on a grey, vertically-slatted wall. The 'X' is composed of thick, rounded strokes and is illuminated from behind, casting a soft glow. It is positioned to the left of the main text.



The word "Elections" is rendered in a large, white, 3D block font, mounted on the same grey, vertically-slatted wall. The letters are thick and have a slight shadow, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The text is positioned to the right of the 'X' logo and is partially cut off on the right side of the image.



Elections Ontario is a non-partisan office of the Legislative Assembly, led by the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), who oversees all aspects of provincial elections.

Our team includes full-time staff, Returning Officers, and field staff across the province's 124 electoral districts. We scale up to deliver elections by establishing over 7,000 voting locations and hiring more than 50,000 poll officials to serve over 11 million electors.

Between elections, we pilot improvements, implement regulatory changes, and support other electoral bodies, while also administering by-elections and referenda as needed.

Our responsibilities include:



Informing electors of when, where, and how to vote.



Ensuring secure, efficient, and accountable elections.



Overseeing the tabulation and delivery of election results.



Managing and reporting on the financial activities of political entities.



Maintaining a list of eligible electors.



The Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, appointed under the province's *Election Act*, who is responsible for the following:

Election Act:

- Administering the electoral process in general elections and by-elections;
- Maintaining the Permanent Register of Electors for Ontario;
- Maintaining a register of electors who temporarily reside outside Ontario;
- Maintaining a provisional register of 16- and 17-year-olds;
- Researching and testing new voting equipment, vote-counting equipment and alternative voting methods;
- Conducting public education on the electoral process;
- Organizing outreach and education for those who face barriers to voting;
- Investigating and reporting apparent contraventions;
- Recommending reforms; and
- Provisioning preliminary lists of electors for municipal, school board and District Social Services Administration Board elections.

Election Finances Act:

- Overseeing the registration and financial activities of political parties, constituency associations, candidates, leadership contestants, nomination contestants and third-party advertisers;
- Online publishing of financial statements filed by political entities as required, including the lists of contributors who contribute more than \$200;
- Online publishing of real-time disclosure of contributions received by political parties and leadership contestants;
- Reviewing financial statements to ensure compliance with the Act;
- Distributing publicly funded subsidies;
- Investigating and reporting apparent contraventions; and
- Recommending reforms.

Duties mandated by other legislation:

- Other specific duties assigned by the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, the *Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999*, and the *Fluoridation Act, 1990*; and
- Meeting the requirements of electoral boundaries as prescribed by the *Representation Act, 2015*.

The election footprint

7K+

locations

where Ontarians could cast a ballot in the 2022 general election.

50K+

poll officials

on average are hired to staff voting locations for in-person voting.

124

electoral districts

exist in the province.

4.7

million

votes were cast in the 2022 general election.

26

registered political parties

represented across all electoral districts in 2022.

897

candidates

ran in the 2022 general election.

A safe and fair election is made possible through the collective work of a wide range of stakeholders. The insights, experiences, and wisdom of each of these groups shape the electoral experience and are critical inputs into our efforts to make voting easy.



Ontarians

Elections Ontario puts the needs of Ontario's millions of electors first. This includes ensuring they know when, where, and how to vote. We will continue to be the trusted voice on elections administration in this province, and work to ensure that the voting process is accessible to all electors.



Legislative Assembly of Ontario

The Office of the Assembly is responsible for enacting, amending, and repealing laws. Elections Ontario collaborates with legislators to align electoral laws with best practices and recommends changes when necessary, in an effort to uphold democratic principles.



Political Entities

Key players in the political process include candidates, nomination contestants, political parties, constituency associations, leadership contestants, and third parties. Elections Ontario regulates their activities under statutory requirements and provides voters lists and electoral maps to support election-related activities.



Municipalities

Elections Ontario provides preliminary lists of electors to municipalities, school boards, and District Social Services Administration Boards at the start of local elections. We will continue to support municipalities by delivering accurate voters lists to help them efficiently prepare for and administer local elections.



Community Groups and Associations

To ensure barrier-free elections, Elections Ontario works closely with a wide range of social groups and seeks input and continued support from community agencies representing persons with disabilities across the province. These organizations act as bridges, helping us reach underrepresented communities and ensuring we deliver our services and provide the support needed for these groups to fully participate in the electoral process.



Media

The media are a cornerstone of a democratic society, as they ensure public access to accurate, complete, and timely information while countering mis- and disinformation. During elections, they convey Elections Ontario's messages on when, where, and how electors can vote, using both traditional broadcast and increasingly digital channels.



Vendors

Elections Ontario relies on the professional support of our vendors to prepare for, manage, and deliver electoral events. This includes technology service providers to safeguard our systems and protect voters. By collaborating with various vendors and experts, our organization can use its resources more efficiently and securely as part of a healthy ecosystem of electoral services.

Elections Ontario administers elections in a rapidly-evolving context influenced by societal, legislative, environmental, and technological factors.

We actively monitor these changes to adapt and ensure we serve Ontarians effectively while upholding electoral integrity. The following factors are anticipated to significantly shape our operations and drive our commitment to modernization and excellence over the next six years.



Extreme Weather Events

The increasing number of natural disasters adds greater uncertainty to electoral planning.

Extreme weather events pose significant challenges to the electoral process: disrupting logistics, damaging infrastructure, and affecting voter health and turnout. Climate-driven disasters such as floods, fires, and storms can severely damage the critical infrastructure that EMBs rely on to administer elections — roadways, telecommunications networks, public transport, and polling stations. For example, during Ontario's 2022 general election, an historic, 9-hour derecho storm travelled the Windsor-Quebec City Corridor, affecting 49 advance poll voting locations.

As these events become the new normal, election planning must focus on risk management by incorporating alternative voting methods, backup power systems, and flexible voting periods to ensure secure and transparent elections while maintaining electoral integrity.



Election Technology Security

The benefits of emerging technology must be balanced against unintended impacts.

Technology is an essential component of the daily operations of electoral administration, and Elections Ontario takes the responsibility of it seriously. We have robust protocols, processes, and systems in place to ensure both our staff and the technology used to conduct elections are safeguarded from cyber threats.

As global actors become increasingly targeted and sophisticated with threats such as ransomware attacks designed to disrupt voting systems or phishing schemes aimed at compromising sensitive voter data, a nuanced approach to managing the risks and benefits of emerging technologies is essential. AI, for instance, offers responsible opportunities for innovation, particularly in routine operations. However, any efficiency gains from these technologies must be carefully balanced to ensure the benefits clearly outweigh the risks.



Fighting Misinformation

The line between truth and fact is becoming progressively blurred.

The rise of AI and the shift from traditional news to social media have created an ecosystem that is increasingly prone to the spreading of false and misleading information. Discerning fact from fiction has become more difficult, despite efforts by social media platforms to address the issue. For EMBs, the spread of misinformation and disinformation about the electoral process — including official results, candidates, polling dates, times, and locations, etc. — poses a serious risk to electoral credibility. It is likely that, moving forward, electors will continue to be exposed to misleading or false information that could affect their participation in the electoral process. The challenge ahead is to implement proactive measures, such as digital literacy initiatives, to help voters better distinguish between fact and fiction.





Public Trust

Public trust in traditional institutions is declining globally.

Global trends over the past decade show declining satisfaction and public confidence in democratic institutions.¹ Trust in EMBs is essential for the acceptance of election results, the facilitation of democratic transitions of power, and the implementation of improvements to the electoral process. Voters also expect strong privacy protections for their personal information.

Despite the broader decline in confidence toward democratic institutions, Elections Ontario continues to maintain strong voter trust in its ability to conduct fair elections. This trust is crucial for sustaining public confidence and voter participation. We cannot take it for granted, which is why we must continuously monitor the changing needs of voters, to create a voting experience that is reliable, fair, efficient, and easy.



The Nature of Work

The changing nature of work presents new opportunities and challenges for EMBs.

The COVID-19 pandemic initiated a seismic shift in work preferences, work habits and work-life balance among Ontarians, which has both direct and indirect implications for EMBs. More electors are working from home, choosing gig-economy contracts over permanent employment, and prioritizing work-life balance over professional advancement², requiring EMBs to provide more options for voting that ensure electors have access to voting when, where and how they wish.

Regardless of the obvious benefits of on-site, in-person presence while an election is underway, Elections Ontario will need to consider providing flexibility and incentives beyond compensation during non-event periods to attract and retain the skilled workforce it needs to support increasingly complex election administration.

¹ Foa, R.S. Klassen, A., Slade, M., Rand, A. and R. Collins. 2020. *The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020*. Centre for the Future of Democracy, Cambridge University.

² CAO Cluster, *Disruptions Report: To Support Strategic Planning*. Elections Ontario, 2024.



Elections Laws

Changes in legislation demand a shift in mindset and workstyle.

Elections Ontario operates within a legislative framework that defines the organization's scope and mandate. As part of the broader public sector, we must also respond to changes in public policy. In recent years, several laws have expanded our responsibilities. *The Helping Tenants and Small Businesses Act, 2020*, tasked Elections Ontario with creating and maintaining a unified voter registry for both municipal and provincial elections.

Emerging technologies in public sector organizations will require EMBs to adopt a nimble, strategic approach, adapting daily operations as well as the policies and procedures supporting election administration — necessitating a shift in both mindset and work style.



Changing Voter Demographics

The needs of voters are changing as demographics in the province shift.

Voter turnout is a fundamental element of democratic participation. The COVID-19 pandemic shifted Canadian attitudes and behaviours towards voting, leading more voters to choose mail-in ballots despite an overall decline in turnout.³

As we move beyond the pandemic, demographic trends are reshaping Ontario's electorate. Our provincial population is projected to increase by 6.6 million over the next two decades, with net migration accounting for 85 per cent of this growth.⁴ By 2029, the population over 65 is expected to rise by 23 per cent, and those over 75 by 27 per cent.⁵

An aging population, a rising influx of newcomers, and increasing participation from younger voters and communities experiencing barriers to voting are shaping a diverse electorate with varied needs and expectations of when, where, and how to vote.

³ Elections Canada, "Canadian Attitudes Towards Voting During the COVID-19 Pandemic – Wave 2" August 2020.

⁴ Ontario Ministry of Finance, "Chapter 1: Demographic Trends and Projections 2024," in Ontario's Long-Term Report on the Economy 2024, May 31, 2024.

⁵ Arthur Sweetman and Boris Kralj, "Projecting the Growth of Ontario's Senior Population and Its Implications for Home Care Services," Centre for Health Economics & Policy Analysis, McMaster University, 2024.

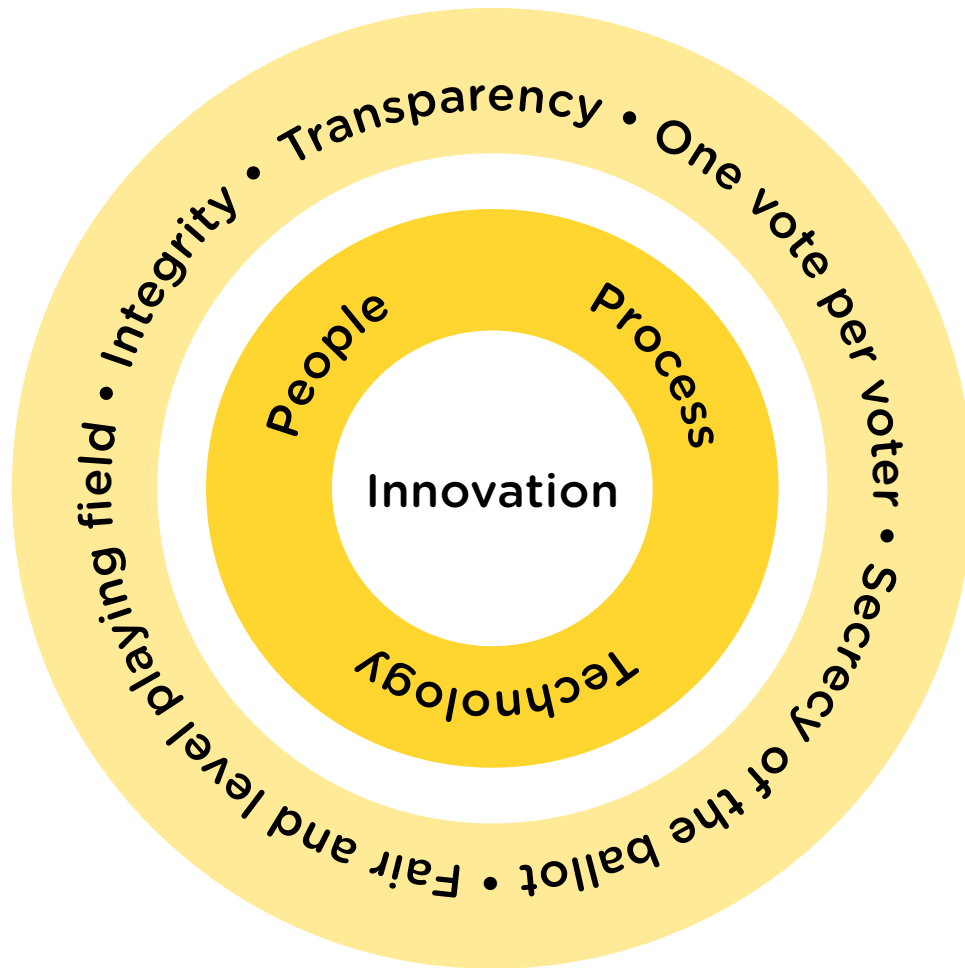


STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The road ahead is unknown, but we have a practical plan to guide us as we navigate the shifting terrain. The priorities listed below build on our successes to date while reinforcing our commitments to Ontarians.

Together, these focus areas will set our staff up for success, enhance our operations, and strengthen our infrastructure, all while maintaining the integrity of the electoral process.

Empowering our people, processes and technology will enable ongoing measured and principled innovation.



PEOPLE

1 Create and nurture a high-performing, unified team capable of responding to and innovating for the evolving electoral landscape.

Strategies:

- Foster professional election administrators through talent development, performance management, and succession planning.
- Cultivate a modern work environment that prioritizes foundational election knowledge, experiential skills development and a trusted, respectful, and creative organizational culture.
- Empower the team with the data, experience and know-how to mitigate risks and maximize opportunities to develop innovative modern services that meet the needs of our stakeholders.

How we will measure our impact:

Employee Confidence to Respond

The percentage of employees who feel confident adapting to changes in the electoral process.

PROCESSES

2 Enhance our processes and capabilities to ensure readiness to deliver fair and efficient elections.

Strategies:

- Establish a risk management framework that monitors risks, identifies responsive strategies, and informs a preparedness plan.
- Lead in the development of transparent, simplified and streamlined processes that address evolving stakeholder needs while optimizing efficiency, effectiveness and fiscal responsibility.
- Prioritize timely and accurate communication to establish Elections Ontario as a trusted source of information for all stakeholders in the election landscape.

How we will measure our impact:

Voter Awareness

Maintain or enhance the percentage of Ontarians who know when, where, and how to vote in the next provincial general election.

TECHNOLOGY

3 Maintain an operational infrastructure that facilitates flexibility, responsiveness, and transparency in election administration.

Strategies:

- Optimize current and future technological developments that support best practices in accessibility, security and efficiency.
- Leverage proven innovations to meet the changing needs, context, and barriers facing Ontarians.
- Enhance data literacy and analytical capabilities to improve evidence-informed decision making.

How we will measure our impact:

Electoral Satisfaction

Maintain or enhance the percentage of Ontarians who say they are satisfied with the election experience.

INNOVATION

4 Uphold Elections Ontario's global reputation as a trusted election administration innovator.

Strategies:

- Consult with Ontarians to develop elector-centred solutions for barrier-free elections that ensure all know when, where, and how to vote.
- Monitor the societal, technical, and environmental contexts to inform measured and principled modernization initiatives.
- Establish a culture of innovation through ongoing research, simulations, prototypes, and pilots to ensure new services are tested and trusted before they are offered to stakeholders.
- Recommend legislative change to support enhancements that meet the needs of our various stakeholders.

How we will measure our impact:

Voter Trust

Maintain or enhance the percentage of Ontarians who express confidence in Elections Ontario.

Elections Ontario has transformed the way Ontarians vote.

From secure technology at the polls to enhanced service delivery through our dedicated mobile app, we continue to find ways to deliver modern services that put the needs of electors first.


We are proud of this progress and have received several international awards recognizing these successes. But we know there is still much more we can do to make voting easier.


Our 2024-2030 strategic plan is the roadmap guiding us forward, upholding our legislative mandate to deliver fair, non-partisan, and accessible elections while empowering us to continue to modernize services. It underscores our dedication to integrity in all we do.


In 2030, we will look back on our achievements and see an organization that is more adaptable and responsive. Data will help us make better decisions, faster. Electors will face fewer barriers to voting and have a deeper understanding of the democratic process. Our teams will be equipped with the tools, skills, and mindsets to excel in 21st century election administration. We will be recognized as a leading electoral management body, known globally for our innovation, integrity, and trustworthiness. This is our renewed commitment to Ontarians.



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