

**Minutes
Election Advisory Committee
September 4, 2003**

1:30 p.m., September 4, 2003
Office of the Ombudsman
1111 Melville Street, Vancouver, British Columbia

Attending:

Committee Members (alpha by Party):

Green Party: Paul George (attending for Pam Munroe)

Liberal Party of BC: R. Hector MacKay-Dunn, Cathy Nobes (attending for Kelly Reichert)

New Democratic Party of BC: Russ Neely, Gerry Scott

Unity Party of BC: Tim Bonner

Elections BC:

Harry Neufeld, Chief Electoral Officer (Chair)

Linda Johnson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer

Bob Williams, Director, Information Technology

Charlene Meehan, Manager, Voter Registration

Shirley Walker, Electoral Operations Officer

Absent:

Marijuana Party: Rob Gillespie

Introductions and Administrative Matters:

Harry Neufeld, Chief Electoral Officer, called the meeting to order and welcomed the Committee members. All attendees introduced themselves. Administrative matters in relation to the meeting facility and attendees' expenses were reviewed.

Agenda Items:

Harry Neufeld provided an overview of the agenda content and general background of related activities since the Committee's May 2003 meeting.

In June 2003, Elections BC participated in a study with Elections Canada to measure the quality of the provincial and federal voters lists, focusing on coverage, currency and accuracy. Audit results indicated that 71% of eligible voters in British Columbia are registered and 74% of the registered voters are at their current address. The annual mobility rate in British Columbia ranges from 15% to 27% depending upon the geographical location and demographics of each electoral district. With only 53 out of every 100 voters registered at their current address, an enumeration, starting May 3, 2004, is required under current legislation. To achieve an improved level of list currency, it would be more beneficial to enumerate closer to the general election scheduled to occur on May 17, 2005.

Elections BC is constantly updating and adding voter records using sources such as drivers license and vital statistics files, phone input from voters via a 1-800 call centre and in-person submissions via Government

Agent services. However, low levels of public participation in voter registration, high levels of population mobility and budget reductions affect the quality of the voters list. A better approach is required to keep it up-to-date for purposes such as administering the *Recall & Initiative Act*, conducting elections and by-elections, and providing political parties with current information. Combining the federal and provincial voters lists would provide the best coverage, and other provinces have already adopted this model. Harry Neufeld reported he was working with Jean-Pierre Kingsley, Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, to devise common strategies for sharing data and maintenance work, and that Elections Canada officials will be meeting at Elections BC during the week of September 8, 2003 to define the fundamental requirements of such arrangements.

In July 2003, an enumeration project team analyzed options and recommended a multi-channeled approach that would produce a higher quality voters list for the 2005 election, and would provide higher quality on-going voters list maintenance. However, the recommended alternative would require legislative change. Chief Electoral Officer, Harry Neufeld briefed the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services on the recommended plan and the project expenditures associated with various enumeration options. The Chair encouraged the Chief Electoral Officer to meet with the Attorney General to discuss removing legislative constraints to allow a more cost-effective way of improving voters list quality prior to the next general election and providing a better long term approach to voter registration. The Attorney General requested that amendment recommendations be developed for submission to the Fall 2003 and Spring 2004 sessions of the Legislature. The intent of the Fall 2003 legislative amendments is to remove the requirement that a general enumeration be conducted in the third calendar year following a general election (*Election Act*, section 42).

Report on Voters List Quality Audit:

Handouts of the presentation material, including maps and a copy of the survey letter, were provided to Committee members. Bob Williams presented details of the quality audit study results and advised that the Committee members will receive copies of the consolidated reports after Elections Canada has submitted their report inputs by the end of September. Elections Canada's priority has been on a "fast track" boundary redistribution in preparation for the up-coming federal election.

The audit study measured the quality of the Elections BC and Elections Canada voters lists as at March 1, 2003. Statistics on currency and coverage were compiled using survey results and information from BC Stats and Elections Canada staff. As a primary update source, Elections Canada uses Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) data from over 80% of Canadians who mark the checkbox on their income tax form to allow information sharing. The audit study data provides opportunities for Elections BC to study additional criteria which will assist in targeting areas for enumeration.

In recent years, an increasing number of voters have been registering in conjunction with voting. Although this provides the opportunity for all eligible voters to vote, it impacts administration activities and campaign expense limits. Maintaining a current voters list is critical to effective electoral administration and minimizing administrative barriers to voter participation. The audit study recommendations include combining federal and provincial voters lists; developing improved registration maintenance programs; and giving special attention to under-covered groups such as aboriginal communities, youth, and the homeless.

Legislative Amendments to be Recommended:

A handout was provided to the Committee members. Linda Johnson presented the details on the Fall 2003 submission to amend the requirement that a general enumeration be conducted in the third calendar year following a general election. With the introduction of fixed election dates, enumeration a full year before an election is not an efficient use of resources. The proposed amendment removes the calendared date but retains the ability of the CEO to conduct targeted enumerations. An overview of the amendment recommendations for the Spring 2004 session was also provided. The amendment package will recommend using the federal voters list as a source of new voters and updates, will address most of the recommendations in the Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 37th Provincial General Election, and will introduce some new amendments. Linda Johnson stressed the importance of meeting the September 5th deadline for legislation requests. Therefore, a "placeholder" request for legislation will be submitted for the Spring 2004 session as there are significant policy issues to be resolved before a detailed package can be put in place.

Hector MacKay-Dunn described the discussion of legislative changes as an information session, not consultation. The members received an agenda before the meeting but did not get details to review. He stated his belief that for consultation as defined in section 16 of the *Election Act*, members should have had more information a week in advance of the meeting before going ahead. He indicated support for improved registration initiatives but stated that he did not know enough about the legislative changes to comment. Other members agreed and some suggested that all recommendations should be submitted for the Spring 2004 session, or that the Fall 2003 recommendations should be amended. The CEO explained that Elections BC requires the Fall 2003 changes to minimize financial impacts of enumeration preparation.

Discussion centered on legislative change requirements, and the need for committee members to have more information for providing intelligent feedback. The members suggested that the legislated requirement for an enumeration to be conducted in May of the third calendar year following a general election might be replaced with "within one year of the scheduled election period". Harry Neufeld advised that enumeration capability was still retained in the suggested amendments for the Fall 2003 session, and that there would be adequate time for intensive consultations before finalizing the Spring 2004 package.

Enumeration Alternatives:

Presentation handouts on the 2004 Enumeration Solution were distributed. Charlene Meehan presented an overview of the enumeration project team's planning work which included a review of previous enumeration methods; Elections BC's current situation including the impact of regional office closures and budget reductions; the opportunities being pursued to maintain an up-to-date voters list; and recommendations for conducting the next enumeration.

The proposed enumeration solution was described as a multi-channeled approach, using synchronized maintenance of Elections Canada and Elections BC voters lists data supplemented by a pre-election targeted registration campaign. To implement the solution, preparation must begin now to remove legislative barriers and to put a plan and policies in place to address all issues including privacy, restrictions to voters list use, and adequate opportunities for all eligible voters to register. Benefits would include lower costs compared to other enumeration alternatives, significant reduction in voting day registration, and an overall improvement in service delivery to the electorate. Beyond enumeration, the recommended approach optimizes on-going voter registration activity and continuous list maintenance.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled to take place in early October 2003. An information package will be e-mailed to the members a minimum of one week prior to the meeting. If there is a delay in issuing the packages, the meeting will be re-scheduled to give adequate time for review.