A Strategic Plan for Saskatchewan's Election Management Body 2014 – 2016

January 2014

professionalizing

improving

focusing

a path
for renewal

ELECTIONS
SASKATCHEWAN

Message from the Chief Electoral Officer

I am very pleased to present Elections Saskatchewan's renewed Strategic Plan— a plan that takes effect immediately and covers calendar years 2014 through 2016.

To be successful, an organization needs a roadmap that points the way to success. When integrated into ongoing management structures, a strategic plan focuses the energy, resources and time of everyone in an organization and allows steady progress toward commonly shared goals.

Developing, documenting and delivering a renewed strategic plan became essential for three reasons. First, Elections Saskatchewan's previous Strategic Plan (2005–2011) had expired prior to my appointment in June 2012. Second, a full four years had passed between the release of the *Hamilton Report* (2009)—which had called for a fundamental overhaul of the structure and staff of Saskatchewan's election management body—and the start of implementing the recommendations articulated in that report. Finally, nearly all of the 13 full-time core staff of Elections Saskatchewan are new to their positions and to the world of electoral process management and administration.

The Strategic Plan described in this document represents a different way of thinking about strategic planning for Elections Saskatchewan.

In addition to issuing a clear plan at the outset of the coming three-year period, we will return to it annually to ensure its continued relevance. Fundamentally, this Strategic Plan will guide us as we establish annual objectives, key related activities and corresponding budget requests.

This plan represents the collective inputs, discussions and consensus agreements of the entire management team at Elections Saskatchewan. In taking this approach, it is meant to guide and define the work of our head office and field leadership teams over the coming three years of our provincial electoral agency's history.

Before the end of 2016, we will develop a new Strategic Plan to replace this one and begin to map out the organization's direction for the next electoral cycle. Until then, this plan defines our priorities until the 28th General Election is fully concluded. It will form the basis of our organizational annual reporting and measurements of our success or shortfalls in achieving the strategic goals we have set.

As you review this document, I hope you see a clear, underlying commitment that Elections Saskatchewan is making to improve the delivery of every type of elections service it provides.

Michael Boda, D. Phil., Ph.D.
Chief Electoral Officer
Province of Saskatchewan

A Path for Renewal

The appointment of a new Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) on June 1, 2012 marked the beginning of a modernization process for Saskatchewan's provincial election management body.

Based on an assessment conducted by David Hamilton in 2009[1], a mandate for leading organizational renewal was provided by the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. A modernization effort was encouraged during the Legislative Assembly's Board of Internal Economy bipartisan process of recruiting the new independent officer assigned responsibility for neutrally administering all provincial electoral legislation. Such a recruitment process is a periodically repeated process, as the tenure of each Saskatchewan CEO is statutorily limited to an appointment period that spans two general elections.

In his first written submission regarding Elections Saskatchewan's budget estimates for fiscal year 2013-14, the new CEO outlined a "path for renewal" by which the province's electoral agency would alter its management approach, restructure staffing and evolve the institution's operation to be consistent with electoral best practice in Canada and in leading democratic jurisdictions around the world[2].

The CEO stated that, as a result of several months of listening to the concerns of a broad range of provincial electoral stakeholders, Elections Saskatchewan would need to focus on the following priorities:

- Professionalizing Saskatchewan's election management body;
- Improving the delivery of electoral events; and
- Renewing the province's focus on democratic stewardship.

Since that budget submission document was tabled, the CEO has continued to reference Elections Saskatchewan's "path for renewal" in other public documents and presentations. This path—including these three stated priorities—has been foundational to discussions held in subsequent months about Election Saskatchewan's organizational purpose, its legal mandate, objectives, values and the various ways to define and accomplish its strategic goals.

In the fall of 2013, Elections Saskatchewan's management team turned its focus to establishing a Strategic Plan for the 2014-16 period. This resulting Strategic Plan is a more detailed articulation for navigating Elections Saskatchewan's "path for renewal" in defining specific work efforts needed over the next three years to make substantive modernization possible.

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[1] David Hamilton, *The Recount: Report of the Review of the Operational Environment and Accountabilities of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer for Saskatchewan (The Hamilton Report)* (Regina: Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, March 2009). Available online at: http://www.legassembly.sk.ca/mlas/board-of-internal-economy/reports/report-the-recount
 David Hamilton is the former Chief Electoral Officer of Northwest Territories and Clerk of the NWT Legislative Assembly.

[2] Michael Boda, *Election Administration in Saskatchewan: 'A Path for Renewal' – Estimates for Fiscal Year 2013-2014* (Regina: Elections Saskatchewan, 2013).

Developing a Strategic Plan

The development of a Strategic Plan for Elections Saskatchewan has been highly dependent on staffing an election management body with individuals capable of facilitating the modernization of Saskatchewan's electoral processes. Considerable effort has been put into establishing a modern organizational structure, defining appropriate roles and responsibilities within the organization, hiring members of the management team and allowing new team member's time to understand their functions and the overall work of the organization.

The CEO insisted that the process of constructing a Strategic Plan for the organization be the result of a consensus-building exercise involving all Elections Saskatchewan managers.

Undertaking strategic planning within an organization that is undergoing a process of renewal and is primarily staffed by persons who are new in their positions presents unique challenges. For these reasons, it was decided that the initial Strategic Plan be created by the management team. As strategic planning becomes the foundation of all planned activities within the organization, a more inclusive strategic planning process will evolve to engage the full complement of permanent staff and incorporate formal input from a full range of electoral stakeholders. These more comprehensive steps in the strategic planning approach[3] will be used when the next Strategic Plan is developed in 2016.

During pre-planning discussions between managers, it was agreed that an exercise for establishing a Strategic Plan needed to determine where the organization should go in the months and years ahead and how it should get there. It was determined that the exercise should provide a documented context managers and staff could use to make informed choices about what and what not to do. It should provide a broad outline for allocating resources, and it should be a process that would rally the organization around a single implementation plan. In addition to these goals, it was also agreed that a Strategic Plan should establish a path for improving the institution's performance, counter inward and short-term thinking, and act as a vehicle for communicating to electoral stakeholders what is most important to Saskatchewan's election management body.

In November 2013, members of Elections Saskatchewan's management team participated in a strategic planning workshop facilitated by two consultants with extensive experience in applied strategic planning in electoral management. The workshop was followed by various meetings, conversations and document reviews that led to the Strategic Plan described in this document. These discussions also resulted in a process of defining immediate key activities necessary to achieve the strategic goals and objectives. This process informed the contents of the budget request for fiscal year 2014-15.

The Strategic Plan described in this document represents a significant departure from how strategic planning had been done within Elections Saskatchewan in the past. The prior process involved creating a plan, publishing it and then basically letting it "rest on the shelf" until it had expired and needed to be recreated. The current plan is meant to be a "living document" that is referenced often, is used to guide priorities and has specific performance measures associated with assessing progress toward the articulated goals it contains, which will be reported on annually.

The Elections Saskatchewan management team is committed to reviewing this plan annually to ensure its continued relevance. Adjustments will be made, if necessary, and the Strategic Plan will guide the establishment of annual objectives to meet strategic goals, help define key related activities involved in meeting those objectives, and inform the development of corresponding annual budget requests.

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[3] Elections Saskatchewan takes electoral best practice very seriously. As such, it will continue to pursue approaches recommended by leading electoral practitioners, including the strategic planning methodology articulated by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in their publication *Strategic Planning for Effective Electoral Management: A Practical Guide for Election Management Bodies to Conduct a Strategic Planning Exercise*, by Antonio Spinelli, October 2011. Available online at: http://www.ifes.org/~/media/Files/Publications/ Books/2011/Strategic_Planning_Guide_2011.pdf

Stakeholders

Over the course of this strategic planning exercise, participants discussed and agreed to the following definition of a "stakeholder."

> **Stakeholder**
> A person, group or organization who affects or can be affected by the organization's actions.

Using this widely-accepted definition, it became apparent to workshop participants that Elections Saskatchewan has a tremendously broad and diverse base of stakeholders, including:

- Voters and prospective voters;
- Registered political parties (including their chief official agents and leadership contestants);
- Candidates for election (including their business managers);
- Elected Members and the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan;
- Members of the Legislature's Board of Internal Economy;
- Constituency associations of registered political parties;
- Unregistered political parties, external organizations and advocacy groups;
- Returning officers and election clerks;
- Enumerators, election officials and other election support workers;

- Media representatives, reporters, columnists, bloggers and contributors;
- Other Canadian Chief Electoral Officers and their organizations;
- Urban and rural municipal election officials;
- External data providers;
- Service organizations, vendors and contractors;
- Academic researchers and political analysts;
- Other independent officers of the Legislative Assembly; and
- Electoral boundary commissions and their required technical support staff.

Addressing the needs and concerns of these stakeholders is critical to the success of Saskatchewan's election management body. As Elections Saskatchewan moves forward with implementing the elements of this Strategic Plan, it will continue consulting with the institution's stakeholders to assess how well the organization is meeting their needs. It aims to identify clear opportunities for improvement and modernization of services.

Finding affordable, effective and transparent methods for obtaining meaningful stakeholder input is necessary to accurately define current and emerging needs that the electoral agency is expected to meet.

Issues and Challenges

The strategic planning exercise considered numerous issues and challenges that will influence Elections Saskatchewan during the current electoral cycle and beyond. A number of those identified are highlighted below at a summary level.

Social and Demographic Trends

There are a number of important trends in Saskatchewan's social and demographic environment that Elections Saskatchewan must be aware of in planning the delivery of electoral events. Among these is a continued increase in Saskatchewan's population, and within that, a significant growth of the Aboriginal population. Part of the overall population growth is attributed to an increasing number of new Canadians who are choosing to live, work and attend school in the province. Elections Saskatchewan must keep abreast of mobility trends to ensure that its services are tailored to meet the changing demographics of the province. Saskatchewan's population is also aging due to rising life expectancy and declining birth rates. This trend is worth noting as Elections Saskatchewan plans for the accessibility of polling sites. For many decades now there has also been a dramatic population shift from farms and rural communities to larger cities and towns. This shift has a major impact on the drawing of constituency and polling division boundaries. It also results in greater geographic dispersion of the population in some areas and greater concentration in others, which, in turn, affects the selection of polling place locations.

Declining Electoral Participation

Electoral participation and voting have been declining in Saskatchewan for the past 25 years. Elections Saskatchewan is aware that some of the variables involved in this decline are outside its scope of responsibility and that many electoral stakeholders will be part of reversing the declining participation trend in the democratic process. However, it must keep pace with public expectations of what minimal barrier to accessing the ballot means in the twenty-first century.

It is particularly troublesome that so many youth seem to have disengaged from the democratic process—only about one-quarter of youth cast a ballot compared to about three-quarters of seniors. Renewed efforts must be made to educate and involve young people in the election process and encourage them to participate in exercising their franchise rights.

Greater Reliance on Technology

While the process of casting a ballot has remained a paper-based, manual procedure in most Canadian elections, technology has played an expanding role in the planning, preparations and delivery of these events. Election management bodies have faced the challenge of improving their information services by leveraging technology effectively. They have increasingly made use of web-technology to inform their stakeholders about the electoral process; to facilitate the recruitment of election workers; to enable voters to locate their polling stations;

to disclose the financial filings of political parties and candidates; and to quickly communicate election results. They have also made increased use of highly interactive platforms, including social media to create, share and exchange information and to respond to user-generated content. With regard to the use of these technologies by political parties and candidates, election management bodies need to ensure that legislation regulating election advertising and communications with voters keeps pace with any new and expanding uses of this technology.

Election organizations today face the challenge of relying on computer-based management information systems to better plan, direct, monitor and control the highly decentralized and complex process of overseeing elections in the field. One of the newer technologies in elections operations, Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, is used to redistribute constituency and polling division boundaries and as the back-end for an interactive web-based poll finding application.

Increased use of technology holds promise in exploring new voting service models. Several new approaches to providing voting services have emerged within other Canadian provinces over the past few years. The prospect of Internet voting has raised considerable concern, among the public, election practitioners, and technology experts, focusing on issues such as security of the voting system, privacy of voting and ballot secrecy.

Changing Demands on Electoral Management

The changing demands and expectations of electoral management were also considered. Beginning with the voter, there is a heightened expectation for an increased level of information and services, improved access and fewer barriers to voting opportunities, reduced wait times, greater security of information and high levels of privacy protection. Disability communities are calling for improved accessibility services and greater accommodation at the polls.

Elections Saskatchewan, along with most Canadian election management bodies, has experienced difficulty with recruitment of temporary election workers. In the 2011 General Election, there was considerable difficulty in hiring sufficient and qualified enumerators for voter registration. The recruitment challenges extend to the hiring of election officials involved in election delivery—individuals who get minimal training, work long hours, receive poor wages and are expected to comply with increasingly complex voting rules and procedures.

Challenges faced by election workers in strictly administering the voting process according to legislative prescription were highlighted following the 2011 Federal Election. In the Ontario electoral district of Etobicoke Centre the second-place candidate legally challenged the election results on the basis of "irregularities" in voting administration. During the court's review of the voting documentation from polls in that district, it became apparent that in many cases election officers were not complying with required procedures. Failures involving improperly completed registration certificates, non-compliant vouching of electors' identities, and poor recordkeeping, led to a prolonged court battle and an uncertain outcome of the election. In addition, concerns were raised among the voting public regarding the use of misleading "robo-calls" and other sources of misinformation used to communicate with voters during the political campaign.

Vision

The organizational vision for Elections Saskatchewan was also considered carefully and established as the following:

> **Vision**
> To be widely recognized as a professional, service-oriented and innovative election management body.

Elections Saskatchewan aims to earn this recognition from provincial stakeholders, including the voting public, media, political parties, candidates and elected Members of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, as well as from organizational partners and election administrators in jurisdictions within and outside of the province.

Role and Mission

The role and mission of Elections Saskatchewan was determined to be:

> **Role and Mission**
> To serve democracy in Saskatchewan by ensuring the impartial and professional delivery of provincial electoral events.

Elections Saskatchewan's management team is aware that an election management body exists primarily to prepare, administer and conduct the full range of electoral events that are defined in provincial election legislation, including general elections, by-elections, referenda, plebiscites, boundary redistributions and voter enumerations.

Values

Over the course of the strategic planning exercise, Election Saskatchewan's management team reflected on the values that are espoused by practitioners of electoral administration across Canada and around the world. In doing so, six core values were identified.

Values
- Independence
- Impartiality
- Professionalism
- Accountability
- Innovation
- Service Orientation

It was determined that these values must be at the foundation of every activity conducted by the organization and should guide the actions and decisions of all staff members. They are values widely shared by Elections Saskatchewan's stakeholders, and are defining elements of a modern election management body.

Strategic Goals

Having established its vision and mission statements and determined the values that are foundational to its work, Elections Saskatchewan's leadership team next considered which strategic goals should be pursued.

Over the next three years (2014–2016), Elections Saskatchewan is committed to achieving six strategic goals:

1. Attract and retain a competent, inclusive and performance-focused Elections Saskatchewan team;

2. Continuously improve electoral management and build institutional capacity through disciplined planning and applied best practice;

3. Facilitate the modernization of Saskatchewan's electoral legislative framework;

4. Innovate and improve services by leveraging technology;

5. Partner and collaborate with other organizations to enhance effectiveness in the delivery of electoral events and services; and

6. Increase accessibility, public awareness and knowledge of the electoral process.

These goals will guide the process of setting work priorities over the next three years and provide a focus for identifying the specific activities necessary for realizing the organization's vision.

Objectives

For each strategic goal identified, multiple objectives were defined for reaching the goal within the next three years.

In order to achieve these objectives, Elections Saskatchewan's managers will further define the key activities and concrete actions that will be the focus of work efforts within each fiscal year.

Of necessity, the objectives listed for each strategic goal listed below are more general in nature and of a longer duration than the more specific ones necessary for establishing annual organizational plans and budgets and reporting on their progress.

However, the linkage between the following longer-term objectives and the shorter-term objectives listed in budget submissions and annual reports will be evident.

The following objectives were identified within each of Elections Saskatchewan's six strategic goals:

1. Attract and retain a competent, inclusive and performance-focused Elections Saskatchewan team.

Objectives

1.a.   Implement an individual employee performance management process with all Elections Saskatchewan head office core staff;

1.b.   Implement a continuous learning/professional development plan for each member of head office core staff as part of their performance management plan;

1.c.   Develop, implement and evolve the content of a comprehensive orientation program for head office employees (full-time and event-based) and field management employees (returning officers and election clerks);

1.d.   Develop and implement a plan, budget and field management training program for hiring roughly 3,000 enumerators and 10,000 election event staff; determine returning officer recruitment support requirements province-wide, within each constituency, and for each different type of event position; and

1.e.   Develop and implement an event training program for enumeration and election field staff, incorporating best practice adult learning methods; revamped training manuals, guides, checklists and forms; and standardized mandatory curricula for consistent delivery in every constituency.

2. Continuously improve electoral management and build institutional capacity through disciplined planning and applied best practice.

Objectives

2.a.   Develop a project portfolio management framework, a standardized project management methodology, and introduce a scalable project management "toolbox" for use by all head office full-time employees;

2.b.   Establish a policy framework and core set of senior management policies related to specific issues associated with electoral management. Ensure these policies are communicated, explained and made accessible to all head office staff and field managers;

2.c.   Develop and implement organization-wide enumeration and election "event plans" using summary level descriptions of the major responsibilities for each service line and field management position; a schedule of deliverables before the writs are issued, during the writ period and following the return of writs; and identification of key dependencies between discrete deliverables; and

2.d.   Develop and implement a comprehensive plan and budget for the various evaluation activities, surveys and audits that will take place before, during and after the election to compile a quantitative and qualitative baseline of assessments regarding service levels, procedural compliance, organizational performance and levels of stakeholder satisfaction.

3. Facilitate the modernization of Saskatchewan's electoral legislative framework.

Objectives

3.a.   Undertake an environmental scan to establish appropriate compensation levels for enumerators and election workers, develop proposed amendments to the Schedule of Fees, and prepare a regulatory change submission for formal review by Cabinet a minimum of one year prior to election day; and

3.b.   Develop and implement a plan, schedule and budget for expert input, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and a public consultation process for the post-election (2016) development of recommendations for modernizing provincial election law, and support for an informed review of those recommendations by the Legislative Assembly.

4. Innovate and improve services by leveraging technology.

Objectives

4.a.   Pilot the use of web-based GIS tools for a systematic returning officer review of their proposed polling division boundaries;

4.b.   Use GIS technology to develop and finalize polling division boundaries which meet the needs of individual constituency returning officers and comply with all statutory requirements;

4.c.   Enhance Elections Saskatchewan's election management system (ESPREE) with required technical updates and functionality improvements identified by field managers in the 27th General Election;

4.d.   Develop a web-based financial filing software application that allows candidate business managers to track political finance contributions and expenses, and to electronically submit their financial reports according to statutory requirements and timeframes;

4.e.   Implement a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system for tracking field management issues, recording public inquiries and complaints, media requests, and ensuring procedural compliance with political finance requirements; and

4.f.   Plan, implement and enhance use of office automation technology to improve operational efficiencies at head office, on the part of field managers and by returning office support staff, before, during and following the 28th General Election. Enhance the MS Office 365 implementation in the pre-writ period and develop Intranet functionality for head office and field leadership team's use.

5. Partner and collaborate with other organizations to enhance effectiveness in the delivery of electoral events and services.

Objectives

5.a.   Identify key organizational partners that can assist in election delivery success, discuss mutual benefits, and develop formal agreements as partnership arrangements; and

5.b.   Establish Memorandums of Understanding with law enforcement agencies in Saskatchewan for assistance in conducting investigations as necessary to ensure real-time compliance and enforcement of electoral laws.

6. Increase accessibility, public awareness and knowledge of the electoral process.

Objectives

6.a.   Develop plans for increased accessibility and election information for the disabled community;

6.b.   Work with educators to increase student knowledge of voting rights and electoral democracy;

6.c.   Develop engaging, general audience educational materials regarding provincial voter registration/voting/candidacy rights and election process information and make them available in multiple formats and languages prior to and during the 28th General Election;

6.d.   Refresh the Elections Saskatchewan website to provide a modern, responsive, mobile device-friendly interface, an improved user experience that meets accessibility standards, and offer high-quality, searchable, well-structured content that is kept up-to-date with timely information; and

6.e.   Develop and implement comprehensive enumeration and election communications plans, schedules and detailed budgets with regard to all statutory and other needed event advertising, media support, news releases, website information creation/release schedules, and dynamic issue management approaches.

Performance Measurement

Elections Saskatchewan's managers are acutely aware that progress towards the achievement of strategic goals must be measured and that performance measurement is a critical aspect of demonstrating a public organization's accountability.

The operationalization of measures to manage organizational performance will be conducted early in the 2014-15 fiscal year.

The specific performance measures selected will be reported on in the Elections Saskatchewan 2013-14 fiscal year annual report that will be submitted to the Legislative Assembly by the CEO in July 2014, and made public at the same time.

Thereafter, measurements of actual performance will be included in each annual report of Elections Saskatchewan.