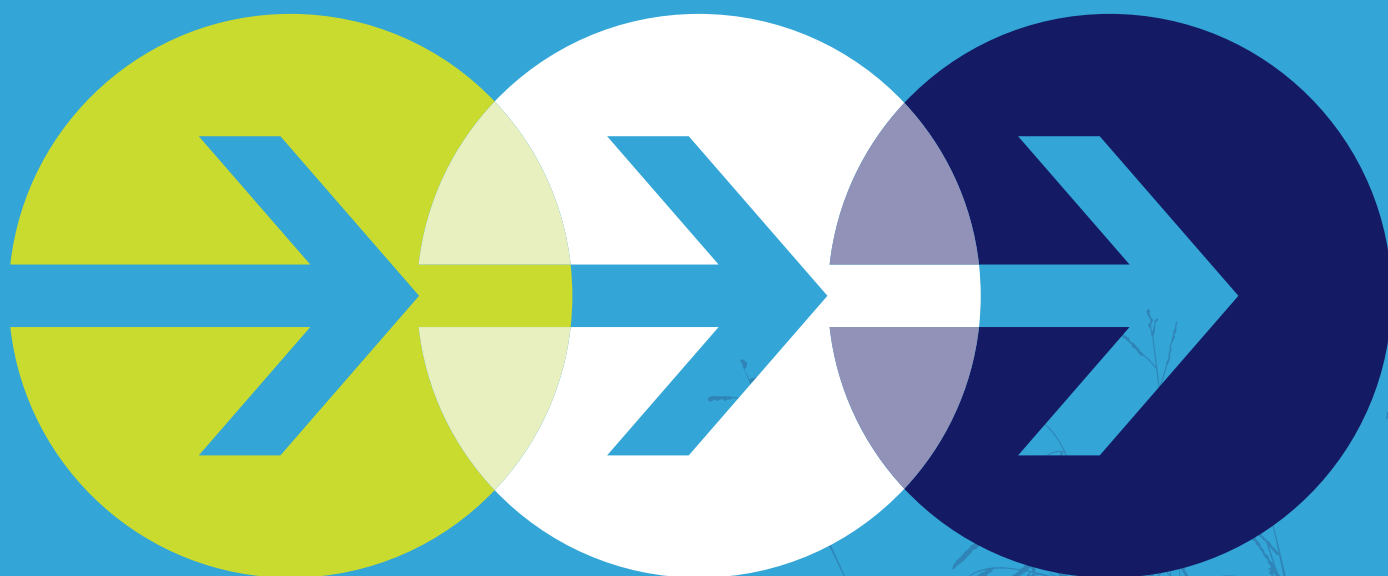
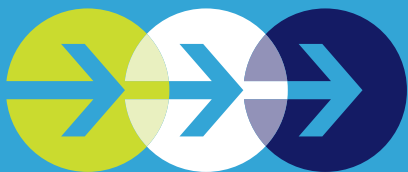


**SERVICE. INTEGRITY. INNOVATION.**



**SERVICE.  
INTEGRITY.  
INNOVATION.**



**EXPANDING ELECTORAL  
EXCELLENCE IN SASKATCHEWAN**

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National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication  
Saskatchewan, Chief Electoral Office  
Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Saskatchewan

Annual  
2022/2023  
Report covers period from April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023  
ISSN 1710-1263 (Print)  
ISSN 2368-1926 (Online)

Elections – Saskatchewan – Statistics – Periodicals. I. Title.  
JL319.A15A55 324.97124'03'021 C 2004-900505-7  
SERVICE. INTEGRITY. INNOVATION: ELECTIONS SASKATCHEWAN 2022–2023 ANNUAL REPORT (V1.0)



June 26, 2023

The Honourable Randy Weekes  
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly  
Room 129, Legislative Building  
2405 Legislative Drive  
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Pursuant to Section 286.1 of *The Election Act, 1996*, I have the distinct privilege of presenting the Annual Report for the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer (Elections Saskatchewan) to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan.

This Annual Report highlights Office activities for the fiscal year period of April 1, 2022 through March 31, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

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

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“Through ongoing collaboration with key stakeholders, our longstanding push for modernization has gained ground over the past year, but more work remains.”

- Dr. Michael Boda, Chief Electoral Officer

## A Message from the Chief Electoral Officer

The 2022–2023 fiscal year was a time of significant transition for Elections Saskatchewan. Over the past twelve months we wrapped up reporting on Saskatchewan’s Twenty-Ninth General Election, supported a Constituency Boundaries Commission from start to finish, tested several important new tools and technologies, delivered a by-election, and witnessed significant changes to the Elections Act. Amidst all this activity, we also developed a new strategic plan to guide Elections Saskatchewan through the next general election and beyond.

*Service. Integrity. Innovation: Expanding Electoral Excellence in Saskatchewan* is the third strategic plan that I have overseen as Saskatchewan’s Chief Electoral Officer. Throughout my tenure as CEO, Elections Saskatchewan has grown and matured. The internal improvements that were central to the last two strategic plans have become ingrained in our organization so that they no longer require focused attention. We have also established and strengthened stakeholder relationships that are crucial to effective elections management. Now that we have achieved those important goals, we can turn our full attention to modernization.

This leads to a fresh strategic imperative—the ultimate aim driving each component of our new strategic plan:

***Saskatchewan’s 30th General Election is modernized and positively perceived by stakeholders.***

Through ongoing collaboration with key stakeholders, our longstanding push for modernization has gained ground over the past year, but more work remains. The Saskatoon Meewasin by-election in September provided a valuable



Dr. Michael Boda has been Chief Electoral Officer since June 1, 2012.



opportunity to test important systems, including electronic poll books and two modules of the new Saskatchewan Election Management System (SEMS). Several other modules of SEMS are nearing completion, and the project is on track to have an election-ready system fully in place by the end of 2023. Upcoming by-elections in the 2023–2024 fiscal year will provide opportunities to test SEMS modules and electronic poll books alongside vote counting equipment.

Following our last election, more than 95 percent of survey respondents representing the public described Elections Saskatchewan as “fair,” and nearly 98 percent said we were “professional.”

The precise format of Saskatchewan’s Thirtieth General Election has not yet been determined. In October 2022 I outlined a framework for modernization in the final installment of *A Report on the Twenty-Ninth General Election*, Volume IV, Chief Electoral Officer’s Recommendations for Legislative Reform. Whether that vision can be realized, however, is a decision for Saskatchewan’s legislators and Board of Internal Economy (BOIE). Amendments to the Election Act in December 2022 allow me to put forward Directives modifying election legislation in Saskatchewan, but those Directives must be approved by the BOIE. This is not consistent with the vision that I put forward in Volume IV, and it adds an extra layer

of complexity to the modernization process. It is my hope that I can work with legislators to transition away from the prescriptiveness of our traditional election legislation toward a system that empowers the CEO to implement changes and improvements.

I have often said that we are serving twenty-first-century voters and political stakeholders with a twentieth-century election system. The time for change has come. But as we update our processes, we must continue to maintain the trust of our stakeholders. Following our last election, more than 95 percent of survey respondents representing the public described Elections Saskatchewan as “fair,” and nearly 98 percent said we were “professional.” Representatives from registered political parties likewise provided high grades for Elections Saskatchewan’s performance. I am committed to honouring and maintaining this high level of trust.

As Chief Electoral Officer for the Province of Saskatchewan, I have presented a consistent, achievable vision of the pathway to a modernized election and all the benefits it brings. Over the past year, our team has embodied that vision through dedicated and skillful service, laying the groundwork for important improvements. The final decision as to whether Saskatchewan will embrace those improvements is now left to our elected MLAs. Regardless of their decision, our team will continue to pursue our strategic imperative guided by our overarching legislation as well as Elections Saskatchewan’s vision, mission, and values. As you read through the pages of this report, I hope you will see the Elections Saskatchewan team’s deep commitment to the important work of expanding and achieving electoral excellence in this province.

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

Regina, Saskatchewan  
June 26, 2023

# ABOUT ELECTIONS SASKATCHEWAN





The many components involved in planning, organizing, and implementing elections in Saskatchewan are overseen by what is described as an election management body (EMB).

An EMB is an independent, non-partisan institution responsible for impartial election administration within a democracy. In Canada, each provincial, territorial, and national jurisdiction has an EMB that administers elections, upholds the democratic rights guaranteed by the Canadian constitution, and conducts electoral events in accordance with applicable legislation.

Elections Saskatchewan fulfills that mandate for this province, serving as the secretariat to the statutory Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. Its leadership team is based in Regina and dispersed across the 61 constituencies that elect the Members of Saskatchewan’s Legislative Assembly.

In the months leading up to a general election, Saskatchewan’s electoral service grows steadily. During the election period, around 12,000 temporary workers from all parts of the province have traditionally been required to administer voting. The modernization efforts described throughout this annual report are designed to bring this number down over time, but elections will always be labour-intensive. These workers serve provincial voters by administering an event that is fundamental to sustaining Saskatchewan’s democratic traditions.

VALUES

Elections Saskatchewan’s core values sustain and motivate its work. During the recent strategic planning process, Elections Saskatchewan’s leadership and staff consistently pointed to five leading values:

- Integrity
  - Innovation
  - Impartiality
- Service
  - Dedication

These values are widely shared by election administrators across Canada and around the globe. They are defining elements of a modern election management body and are consistent with the Electoral Integrity Framework issued by Elections Canada.<sup>1</sup>

STAKEHOLDERS

As the organizer of major civic events, Elections Saskatchewan has an extensive list of stakeholders. These include:

- Voters and prospective voters;
- Registered political parties (including chief official agents, political party staff, and volunteers);
- Candidates for election;
- Candidates’ financial agents;
- Elected Members of 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;
- Media representatives, reporters, columnists, bloggers, and contributors;
- Other Canadian Chief Electoral Officers and their institutions;
- Urban, rural, and Indigenous election management bodies;
- External data providers;
- Service organizations, vendors, and contractors;
- Academic researchers and political analysts;
- Other independent officers of the Legislative Assembly; and
- Electoral boundary commissions.

Elections Saskatchewan’s success depends largely on its ability to address the needs and concerns of its stakeholders. This is reflected in the 2023–2025 Strategic Plan, which foregrounds stakeholders and explicitly identifies them as central to Elections Saskatchewan’s mission and strategic imperative.

**Mission:**

Elections Saskatchewan is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly. We engage with all stakeholders to deliver and regulate provincial electoral events.

**Strategic Imperative:**

Saskatchewan’s 30th General Election is modernized and positively perceived by stakeholders.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Head Office Leadership Team

The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. As head of Elections Saskatchewan, the CEO ensures the fair and equitable conduct of operational, administrative, and financial practices related to the electoral process. The CEO is assisted in these legislated responsibilities by a head office leadership team.

Elections Saskatchewan’s primary responsibility is to maintain an appropriate state of provincial election readiness. To that end, Elections Saskatchewan must appoint and train requisite numbers of constituency returning officers and election officers to ensure electoral preparedness throughout each government’s mandate, and to be fully ready for by-elections and scheduled general elections.

*The Election Act, 1996*<sup>2</sup> also places a duty on the CEO to assist registered political parties, candidates,

chief official agents, and financial agents to ensure the Election Act’s financial transparency and disclosure goals are met. Elections Saskatchewan publishes guides for party chief official agents and candidate financial agents to help them fulfill their administrative and financial reporting responsibilities, compile the necessary support documentation, and ensure their annual financial disclosures are filed in accordance with the Election Act and *The Political Contributions Tax Credit Act, 2001*.<sup>3</sup>

Where applicable, Elections Saskatchewan is responsible for assessing and reimbursing election expenses, which are paid from the province’s General Revenue Fund. Elections Saskatchewan has established a financial review system to certify public reimbursement of election expenses through the examination and audit of registered political parties’ and candidates’ expense returns and required disclosure documentation. To promote transparency, expense return details are tabled in the Legislative Assembly and posted on Elections Saskatchewan’s website.

Elections Saskatchewan is also responsible for investigating offences under the Election Act. While the Act is regulatory rather than criminal, the role of Elections Saskatchewan is to inspect, investigate, and inquire about instances where contravention of the Election Act is suspected or alleged, as deemed necessary by the CEO. Since this responsibility is a matter of considerable discretion and is often initiated by complaints filed by interested parties, it is incumbent upon Elections Saskatchewan to consider whether any specific situation has contravened the overall purpose, policy rationale, and/or legislative intent of the province’s electoral legislation.

To ensure political stakeholders and the public are aware of important aspects of its role and mandate, Elections Saskatchewan maintains an outreach program that responds to public enquiries and liaises with registered political parties, candidates, and their chief official agents and financial agents.

The CEO reports annually to the Legislative Assembly, via submission of a written report that is tabled by the

<sup>1</sup> Elections Canada’s Electoral Integrity Framework can be found online at <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=abo&dir=fra&document=index&lang=e>.

<sup>2</sup> *The Election Act, 1996*, SS 1996, c. E-6.01 (the Election Act).

<sup>3</sup> *The Political Contributions Tax Credit Act, 2001*, SS 2001, c. P-15.2.



Speaker, on matters related to administering the Election Act. In addition to such annual reporting, the CEO also prepares reports to be tabled in the Legislative Assembly on all elections administered by his office. A *Report on the Twenty-Ninth General Election*<sup>4</sup> was published in four separate volumes: 1) Statement of Votes, 2) Administrative Review, 3) Statement of Expenditures, and 4) Chief Electoral Officer's Recommendations for Legislative Reform. Administrative and financial reporting for constituency by-elections are encapsulated in individual by-election reports.

The environment within which Elections Saskatchewan is accountable is unique and complex due to the potential timing uncertainty of the provincial electoral cycle, the decentralized nature of election administration, the requirement for an extremely large temporary workforce, and the interaction of registered political parties, candidates, media, and the electorate. The integrated management of this highly decentralized process rests with Elections Saskatchewan and depends heavily on its impartial and effective administration of the process integrity controls contained in the Election Act.

### The Field Leadership Team

While central electoral administration is the responsibility of Elections Saskatchewan's head office leadership team, the regional and constituency-level conduct of electoral events is the responsibility of the field leadership team.

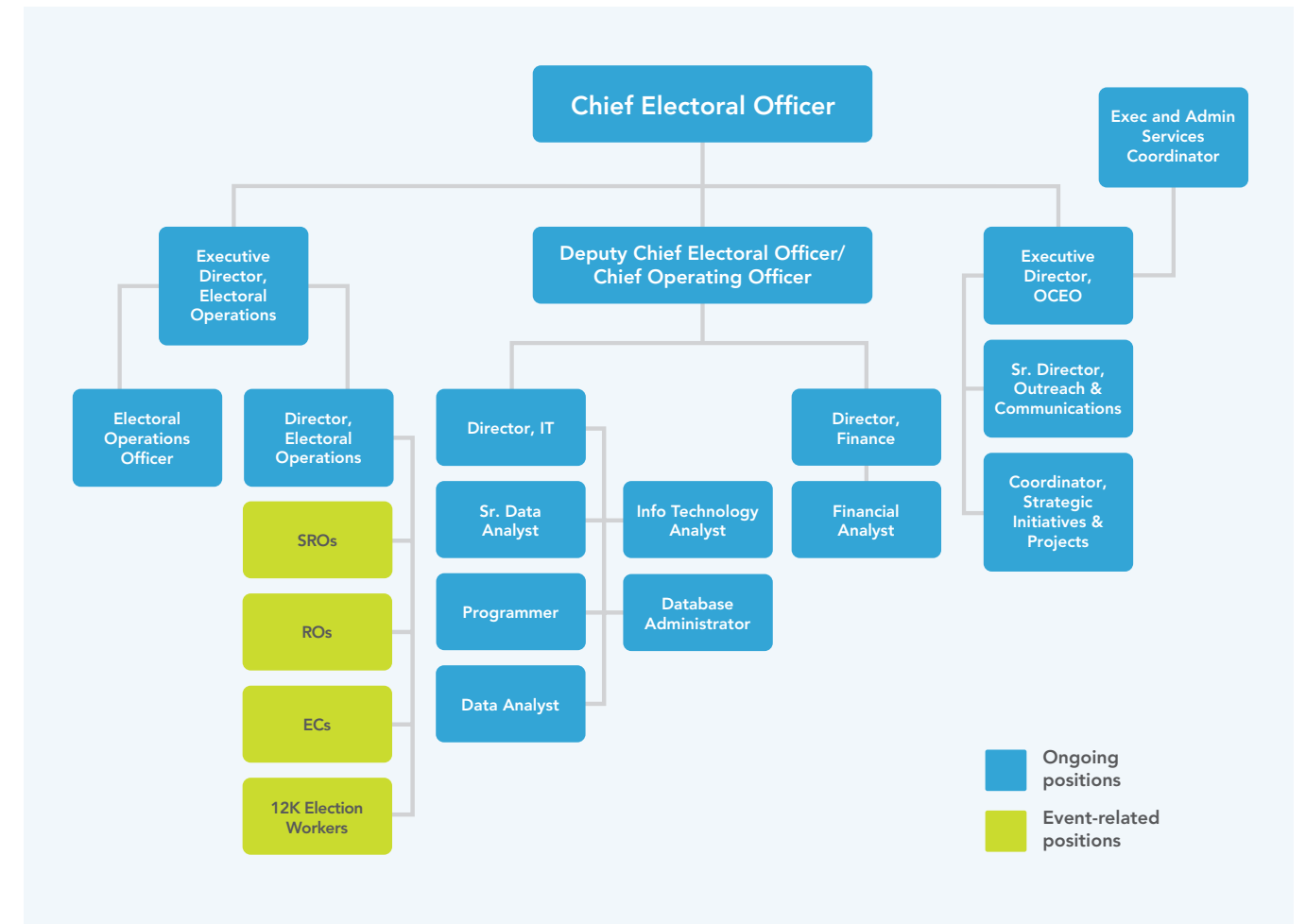
Supervisory returning officers (SROs), each representing a different geographic zone that comprises five to seven constituencies, are responsible for supporting returning officers within those constituencies in performing their duties. SROs act as a liaison between the head office and the constituency returning officers and provide oversight to ensure electoral events are administered and conducted at a consistently high standard across the province in accordance with direction from Elections Saskatchewan's executive leadership.

Representing Elections Saskatchewan at the local level, each constituency has a returning officer (RO) who is assisted by an election clerk (EC). These two individuals are entrusted with upholding the neutrality of the province's decentralized electoral process within their constituency, and are responsible for the administration, conduct, and reporting of electoral proceedings for general elections, by-elections, referendums, and plebiscites.

An important part of achieving and maintaining election readiness is having constituency ROs and ECs appointed and in position within each of the province's 61 constituencies. The CEO appoints all provincial ROs and ECs. Notices of all RO appointments (or cancellations) are published in *The Saskatchewan Gazette*. RO and EC vacancies are filled through independent merit-based competitions.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

Elections Saskatchewan (2022–23)





# REPORT ON 2022–2023

SERVICE. INTEGRITY. INNOVATION.

The 2022–2023 fiscal year saw many significant milestones. The Chief Electoral Officer submitted the final volumes of *A Report on the Twenty-Ninth General Election*. Saskatchewan's Constituency Boundaries Commission, which is struck once every ten years, commenced and completed its report on new electoral boundaries. The Legislative Assembly amended the Elections Act, clarifying the extent of the CEO's authority to modify legislation. A new strategic plan was developed as the previous plan came to a close. A by-election in Saskatoon provided an opportunity to pilot new processes and equipment. Finally, development and testing continued on a new election management system, with components of the system successfully employed in that same by-election.

Throughout these varied tasks, Elections Saskatchewan carried forward with its long-term modernization initiative—developing, testing, and advocating for improved legislative and technological solutions to critical election management issues.



CEO Dr. Michael Boda and Lac La Ronge Indian Band Chief Tammy Cook-Searson sign an MOU to work together to reduce barriers in voting.

## Highlights

- **April 28, 2022:** Appointment of Saskatchewan Constituency Boundaries Commission
- **June 1, 2022:** Work commences on new strategic plan
- **June 8, 2022:** Chief Electoral Officer signs Memorandum of Understanding with Lac La Ronge Indian Band agreeing to work together to reduce barriers in voting—Elections Saskatchewan's first MOU with a First Nation community
- **June 14, 2022:** Tenth Annual Meeting between Elections Saskatchewan and the province's Registered Political Parties
- **June 27, 2022:** Publication of Volume III of *A Report on the Twenty-Ninth General Election*, Statement of Expenditures
- **July 27, 2022:** Release of *Interim Report of the Saskatchewan Constituency Boundaries Commission*<sup>5</sup>
- **September 26, 2022:** Saskatoon Meewasin by-election, with testing of Voting Record, modified Vote by Mail system, electronic poll books, absence of poll clerk, and components of election management system
- **October 17, 2022:** Publication of Volume IV of *A Report on the Twenty-Ninth General Election*, Chief Electoral Officer's Recommendations for Legislative Reform
- **October 27, 2022:** *Final Report of the Saskatchewan Constituency Boundaries Commission* submitted to the Legislative Assembly
- **December 6, 2022:** Royal assent granted to Bill 119, *The Representation Act*,<sup>6</sup> enshrining new constituency boundaries in legislation
- **December 7, 2022:** Royal assent granted to Bill 123, *The Election Amendment Act, 2022*<sup>7</sup>
- **March 31, 2023:** Completion of new strategic plan

<sup>5</sup> The Interim Report and Final Report of the Saskatchewan Constituency Boundaries Association are available online at [saskboundaries.ca/reports/](https://saskboundaries.ca/reports/).

<sup>6</sup> *The Representation Act, 2022*, SS 2022, c. 48 (the Representation Act).

<sup>7</sup> *The Election Amendment Act, 2022*, SS 2022, c. 49 (the Election Amendment Act).



## STRATEGIC PLANNING – SERVICE. INTEGRITY. INNOVATION: EXPANDING ELECTORAL EXCELLENCE IN SASKATCHEWAN

The most significant milestone of the fiscal year was the conclusion of Elections Saskatchewan’s previous strategic plan<sup>8</sup> and the creation of a new plan, *Service. Integrity. Innovation: Expanding Electoral Excellence in Saskatchewan*.<sup>9</sup> This new strategic plan maintains a clear focus on Elections Saskatchewan’s ongoing modernization initiative, emphasizing its importance for Saskatchewan’s Thirtieth General Election. The plan was developed under the leadership of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) with input from Elections Saskatchewan team members, including the Field Leadership Team.<sup>10</sup>

The planning process began with an environmental scan pointing to important trends such as developments in election management technologies, shifting voter expectations, lower voter turnout, staffing challenges, and concerns relating to the dissemination of misinformation. Elections Saskatchewan’s CEO, executive staff, and management team then participated in several planning sessions addressing needs, opportunities, and possible trajectories for Elections Saskatchewan. Finally, the draft strategic plan was refined to articulate the priorities that will guide Elections Saskatchewan through to 2025. This end date was chosen to ensure that future strategic plans will align with the election cycle, creating a natural connection between each plan and the administration of each election.

The plan is summarized in the one-page strategy map on the next page. Key points to note include:

- the ongoing centrality of Elections Saskatchewan’s modernization initiative,
- the fundamental importance of electoral integrity,
- broadening access to voting opportunities,
- an emphasis on stakeholder confidence in the electoral process, and
- commitment to an ever-deepening culture of service.

The most significant milestone of the fiscal year was the conclusion of Elections Saskatchewan’s previous strategic plan and the creation of a new plan, *Service. Integrity. Innovation: Expanding Electoral Excellence in Saskatchewan*.

# 2023–2025 STRATEGY MAP



<sup>8</sup> Elections Saskatchewan. *Sustaining. Leading. Modernizing. Advancing Electoral Excellence in Saskatchewan: A Strategic Plan for Elections Saskatchewan, 2017–2022* (Regina: Elections Saskatchewan, December 2017). The strategic plan can be found on Elections Saskatchewan’s website at <https://www.elections.sk.ca/reports-data/strategic-planning/>.

<sup>9</sup> Published in June 2023 on Elections Saskatchewan’s website at <https://www.elections.sk.ca/reports-data/strategic-planning/>.

<sup>10</sup> The Field Leadership Team consists of 61 returning officers, 61 election clerks, and 12 supervisory returning officers, and includes members from all parts of the province.



ELECTIONS SASKATCHEWAN 2023–2025 STRATEGY MAP

OUR HOPE AND DREAM: The people of Saskatchewan trust, value, and participate in their democracy.

VISION: We are a collaborative leader in establishing and refining best practices in election management in Canada

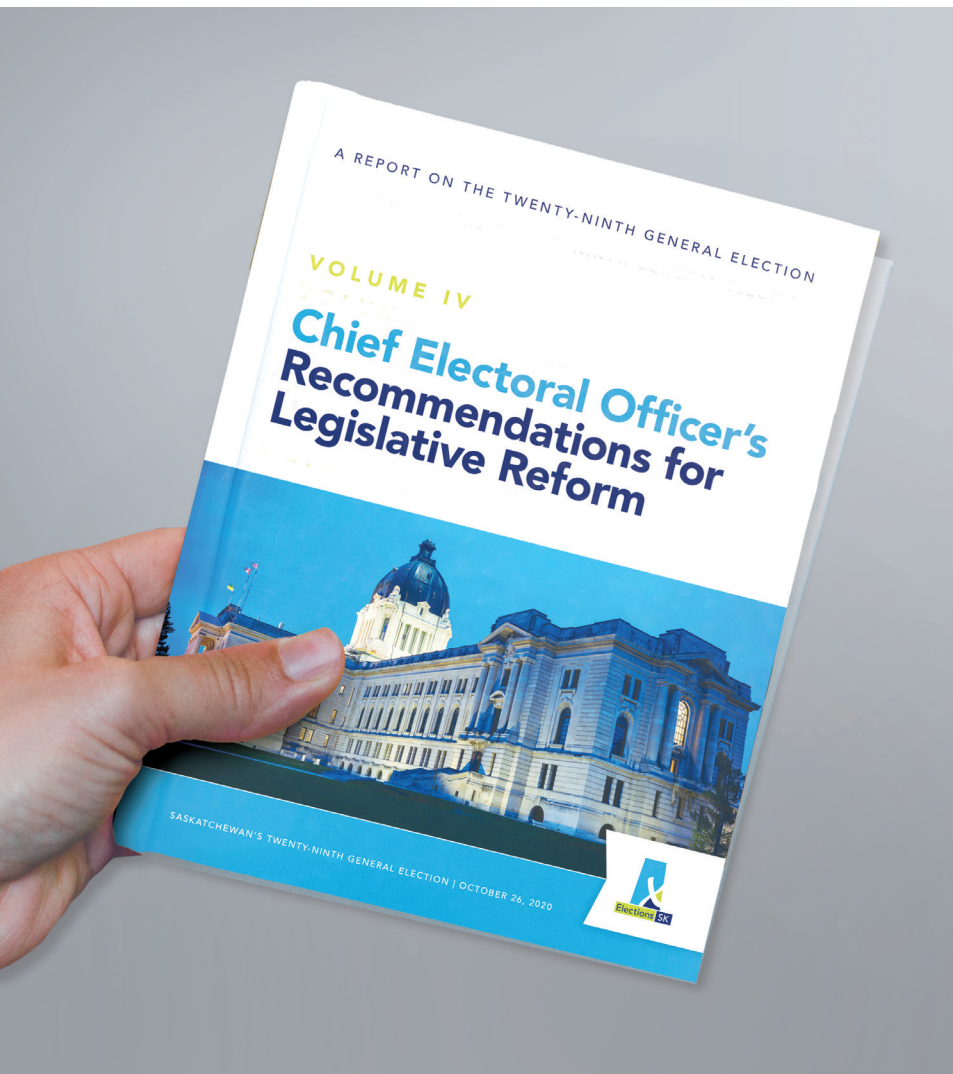
MISSION: Elections Saskatchewan is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly. We engage with all stakeholders to deliver and regulate provincial electoral events.

VALUES	INTEGRITY	INNOVATION	IMPARTIALITY	SERVICE	DEDICATION
	We administer elections that are reliable, secure, transparent, and accessible.	We improve and modernize the election system while maintaining the trust of our stakeholders.	We are objective and treat stakeholders equitably and fairly.	We excel in how we serve stakeholders and colleagues in support of our mission.	We proudly and professionally administer electoral activities that support our democracy.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE: Saskatchewan’s Thirtieth General Election is modernized and positively perceived by stakeholders.

<b>THREE-YEAR DELIVERABLES</b> 5.0 We meet our strategic imperative by accomplishing the following for those we serve:	<b>5.1 Election Management</b> 5.1.1 Modernize voter services management in accordance with legislation and electoral best practice. 5.1.2 Modernize election management system. 5.1.3 Modernize leadership of and collaboration with field leadership team (FLT) and election workers.	<b>5.2 Regulatory Affairs</b> 5.2.1 Modernize and implement a political finance program to facilitate compliance by political parties, candidates, and financial agents. 5.2.2 Better serve political participants and registered political parties to navigate and comply with the electoral legislation through supportive relationships and education. 5.2.3 Modernize systems to ensure legislative compliance of political and governmental stakeholders during the election period.	<b>5.3 Stakeholder Engagement</b> 5.3.1 Educate all stakeholders on modernization changes to the electoral processes. 5.3.2 Engage all stakeholders to increase awareness and reduce barriers to participate and work in the electoral system. 5.3.3 Collaborate with municipal and Indigenous election management bodies on issues of common concern and best practices in election administration.
<b>STAKEHOLDERS (THOSE WE SERVE)</b> 4.0 Our success comes from serving:	<b>4.1 Voters</b> “My voting experience was accessible, fast, and easy. I trust our electoral process.”	<b>4.2 Political Parties and Candidates</b> “I was provided with the support and information needed to comply with legislation. I trust our electoral process.”	<b>4.3 Partners</b> “I was provided with the support and information needed to fulfill my role. I trust our electoral process.”
<b>FINANCES</b> 3.0 We ensure accountability and sustainability by:	<b>3.1 Immediate Term:</b> 3.1.1 Expending funds in accordance with policies and legislation.	<b>3.1.2</b> Transparently reporting and managing election spending and reimbursements.	<b>3.2 Long Term:</b> 3.2.1 Investing in modernization efforts toward improved financial efficiencies in elections administration.
<b>OPERATIONS</b> 2.0 We strive for operational excellence with specific emphasis in:	<b>2.1 Systems Refinement</b> 2.1.1 Implement new Election Management System (EMS). 2.1.2 Improve procurement processes. 2.1.3 Improve warehouse processes and operations.	<b>2.2 External Communication</b> 2.2.1 Strengthen mechanisms for communication with stakeholder groups. 2.2.2 Build and maintain important relationships with stakeholder groups.	<b>2.3 Risk &amp; Project Management</b> 2.3.1 Inventory and address organizational risks. 2.3.2 Develop rigorous internal project management. 2.3.3 Refine simulation processes that support modernization and preparedness.
<b>ORGANIZATION</b> 1.0 We strive for organizational excellence with specific emphasis in:	<b>1.1 Organizational Capacity</b> 1.1.1 Enhance institutional memory through process documentation. 1.1.2 Build redundancies into the organization to accommodate election pressures. 1.1.3 Update policy documentation.	<b>1.2 Team Preparedness</b> 1.2.1 Develop timely hiring and training practices aligned with modernization. 1.2.2 Further enhance training with principles of adult education and modern technology. 1.2.3 Implement strategies to promote an inclusive and representative election workforce.	<b>1.3 Culture</b> 1.3.1 Define and reinforce service-oriented organizational culture. 1.3.2 Develop workplace policies to sustain healthy and high-performing employees throughout the election cycle. 1.3.3 Improve internal communication to amplify employee awareness of and identification with vision, values, and strategic imperative.

## COMPLETING CLOSE OUT OF SASKATCHEWAN'S 29TH GENERAL ELECTION



The final stage of close-out for Saskatchewan's 2020 General Election ended with the submission of Volume IV of *A Report on the Twenty-Ninth General Election*.

It takes several years both to plan for and to close out an election. The final stage of close-out for Saskatchewan's 2020 General Election ended with the submission of Volume IV of *A Report on the Twenty-Ninth General Election* (the Report), Chief Electoral Officer's Recommendations for Legislative Reform, on October 17, 2022.<sup>11</sup>

Post-election reporting is a significant effort that typically includes the public release of poll-by-poll election results, detailed financial data, and lessons learned. It is an important step in reinforcing election integrity and ensuring each subsequent event is administered better than the last. Volumes I and II of the Report were published during fiscal year 2021–2022 and are addressed in Elections Saskatchewan's annual report for that year. Volume III, Statement of Expenditures, was published on June 27, 2022. It contains a detailed account of the total costs of planning, preparing for, and administering Saskatchewan's Twenty-Ninth General Election.

Volume IV, Chief Electoral Officer's Recommendations for Legislative Reform, was published on October 17, 2022. This final volume of the Report focuses on lessons learned and recommendations stemming from the Twenty-Ninth General

Election. It includes a comprehensive outline, history, and explanation of legislative amendments recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer, including a suite of changes to support Elections Saskatchewan's important and longstanding three-phase modernization initiative. The recommendations in Volume IV are a critical point of reference for many of the items in this annual report, including the sections on legislative change, strategic planning, by-elections, and preparations for the Thirtieth General Election in 2024.

## LEGISLATIVE CHANGE



The modernization initiative addressed in Volume IV is a long-term, three-phase project that began under Elections Saskatchewan's 2014–2016 strategic plan.<sup>12</sup> While the 2017–2022 strategic plan proposed completing Phase Two in the Twenty-Ninth General Election, those plans were postponed by the threat of an early election and then by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Thirtieth General Election will provide another opportunity to advance key elements of Phase Two, which focuses on three categories of improvements:

- adoption of an election period rather than an election day;
- updating election processes and administration where practicable, including the use of electronic poll books, vote counting machines, and limited implementation of flexible (i.e., "Vote Anywhere") polling locations; and
- broadening access to voting.

There are many benefits to these changes: increased opportunities for the people of Saskatchewan to vote; improved system integrity through real-time voter strike-off; a more efficient elections workforce; improvements over counting ballots by hand; and reduced dependency on workers who are becoming increasingly difficult to recruit.

The most effective way that the Legislative Assembly can achieve these results, in the short term, is by expanding the Chief Electoral Officer's discretion to implement alternative voting processes. The benefits of this expanded discretion were amply demonstrated during the Twenty-Ninth General Election.

During the Twenty-Ninth General Election, the Chief Electoral Officer acquired a higher degree of discretion in order to respond to the exigencies of the pandemic. He used that discretion to implement efficient processes that responded to the realities of the situation and served voters and political stakeholders well. Centralization of the Vote by Mail initiative, for instance, was a crucial aspect of Elections Saskatchewan's 2020 pandemic response. It revolutionized Saskatchewan's mail-in voting process in a very short time and was utilized by tens of thousands of voters. Without emergency powers, though, legislative constraints would have prevented the Chief Electoral Officer from making this valuable and important decision.

A key recommendation of Volume IV of the Report was to increase the Chief Electoral Officer's flexibility under the legislation, empowering him to instruct Elections Saskatchewan to make further beneficial changes in advance of the next election in 2024.<sup>13</sup> This recommendation was intended to serve as a bridge to the creation of new, less

## The Chief Electoral Officer will continue to recommend legislative amendments that support a transition away from overly prescriptive legislation.

prescriptive election legislation well in advance of the province's Thirty-First General Election in 2028.

On December 7, 2022, the Legislative Assembly adopted some of Volume IV's recommendations in Bill 123, *The Election Amendment Act, 2022*.<sup>14</sup> Under the newly added sections 5.3–5.5 of the Election Act and the previously existing section 5.2, the Chief Electoral Officer can introduce the framework described in Volume IV of the Report via Directives; however, the Board of Internal Economy must first offer its approval. This includes the adoption of a polling period (rather than discreet advance and election day voting), electronic poll books, and other modifications.

One notable issue is that vote counting equipment is not explicitly referenced within the amended Election Act. The CEO can still direct the introduction of vote counting equipment as described in Volume IV using the previously existing (and more general) section 5.2, but it is notable that this equipment was not specifically accounted for in the same manner that electronic poll books were. This is problematic, as best practice in election administration normally pairs electronic poll books with vote counting equipment. This pairing ensures that efficiencies introduced at the front end (serving voters) are matched by both efficiencies and system integrity at the back end (counting votes). Moving away from this pairing of technology can lead to issues counting ballots accurately and in a reasonable amount of time at the conclusion of voting.

There are other potential issues, including a requirement in section 5.4 forcing electronic poll books to be deployed at all polling locations in constituencies meeting specific population criteria.<sup>15</sup> In light of Saskatchewan's size and

geographic diversity, it would have been preferable for the CEO to be provided with as much flexibility as possible to exercise his best judgement on when and where to deploy technology.

Overall, while the December 2022 amendments to the Election Act did not provide the type of flexibility that the CEO had initially requested, the framework to move ahead is in place if the Board of Internal Economy provides its approval. This introduces an external risk that may impair the CEO's ability to address critical issues and problems. Moving forward, the Chief Electoral Officer will continue to recommend legislative amendments that support a transition away from overly prescriptive legislation to a framework that provides policy instructions while allowing the CEO to make implementation decisions.

The Chief Electoral Officer also continues to recommend modifications to municipal election dates. The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure adequate time between municipal and provincial elections.<sup>16</sup> If this issue is not addressed, the 2024 election will see a repeat of the confusion experienced by voters in 2020.

Finally, on a positive note, many of the campaign finance changes recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer were adopted in the 2022 amendments to the Election Act. One practical outcome of these changes is that candidate election expense returns are no longer required to be audited if the candidate's election expenses, contributions, and event proceeds each fall below \$1,000.<sup>17</sup> This will simplify a complex reporting process, reducing the burden on candidates and financial agents while having minimal impact on overall integrity and transparency.

It is essential that Elections Saskatchewan continue moving forward with its modernization initiative. However, that cannot easily happen without either comprehensive changes to legislation or a transition to a model wherein the CEO can define procedures via Directive, as originally proposed in Volume IV of the Report. Without those amendments, it will be difficult for Elections Saskatchewan to keep its practices aligned with peer jurisdictions in Canada and around the world.

## CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES COMMISSION

Every 10 years, following the release of census data by Statistics Canada, a Constituency Boundaries Commission is appointed pursuant to *The Constituency Boundaries Act, 1993*.<sup>18</sup> The Commission's mandate is to redraw constituency boundary lines with the goal of ensuring an equal distribution of voters across Saskatchewan's provincial constituencies.

Premier Scott Moe appointed a new Constituency Boundaries Commission on April 28, 2022. The Chief Electoral Officer was appointed Secretary, providing logistical support to the Commission.



### Timeline

- Appointment of Constituency Boundaries Commission, with Chief Electoral Officer as Secretary: April 28, 2022
- Mapping Sessions: June 6–8, 2022
- Delivery of Interim Report: July 27, 2022
  - Filed with Clerk of Executive Council
  - Published online at [saskboundaries.ca/reports](https://saskboundaries.ca/reports)
  - Copies circulated to public libraries throughout the province for public viewing
- Solicitation of Written Submissions: July 27 to August 22, 2022
- Public Hearings:
  - Saskatoon: September 6, 2022
  - North Battleford: September 7, 2022
  - Regina: September 12, 2022
  - Swift Current: September 13, 2022
  - Virtual Hearing: September 16, 2022
- Final Sessions: September 18, 2022
- Final Report tabled October 28, 2022

The Commission's mandate is to redraw constituency boundary lines with the goal of ensuring an equal distribution of voters across Saskatchewan's provincial constituencies.

Following the public consultation phase, the Commission prepared a set of final recommendations. The Commission's Final Report was tabled on October 28, 2022,<sup>19</sup> and adopted by the Legislative Assembly on December 6 pursuant to The Representation Act. Those recommendations will guide the delineation of constituencies for the next ten years.

<sup>14</sup> *The Election Amendment Act, 2022*, SS 2022, c. 49.

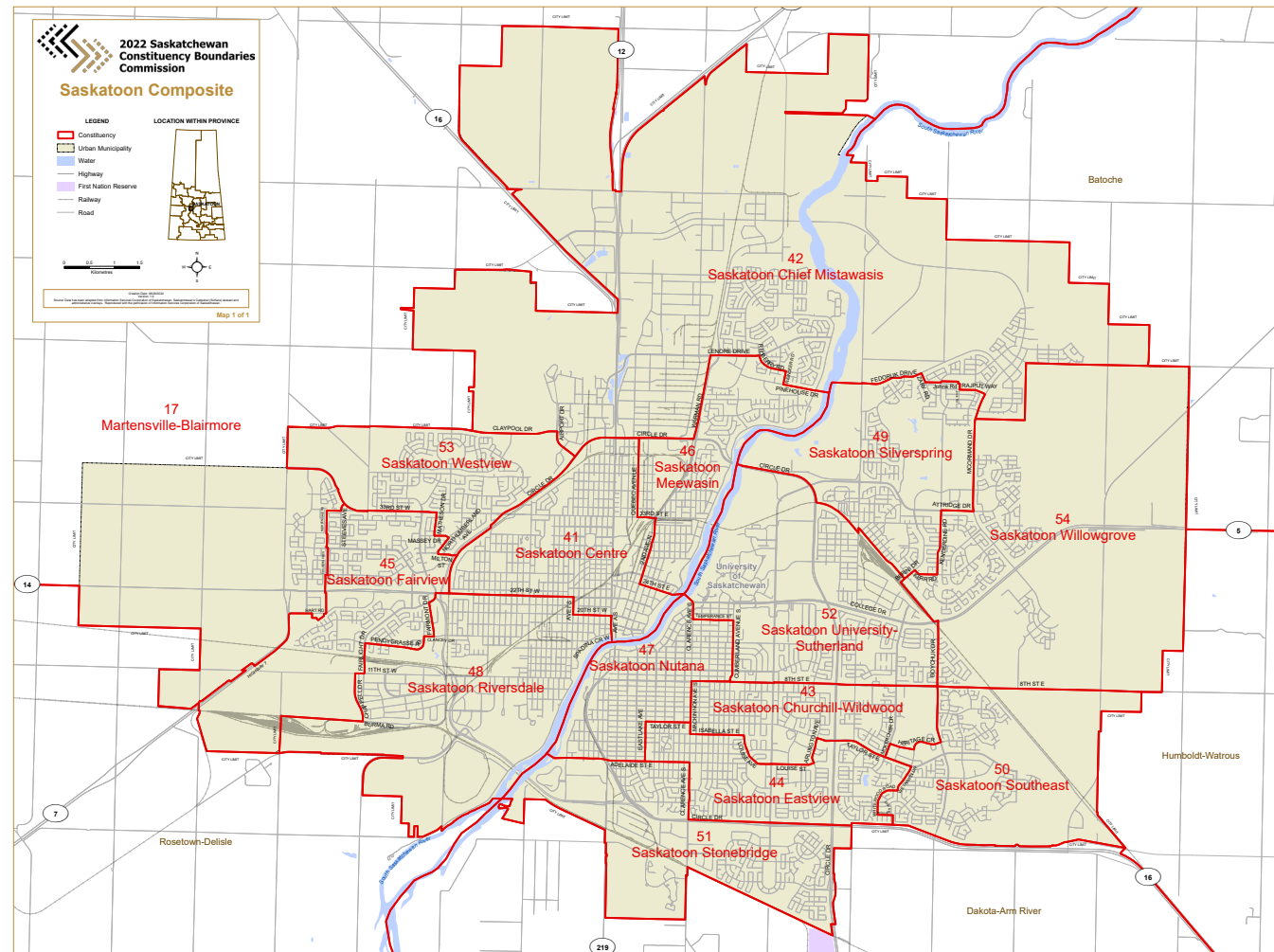
<sup>15</sup> See the Election Act, s. 5.4(2) for the specific language which requires that, if electronic poll books are to be used, that they be rolled out in every constituency that includes a city with a population of more than 20,000 people. This would prevent the CEO from using electronic poll books in only one major city and not another.

<sup>16</sup> See *Resolving the Municipal/Provincial Election Timing Problem in Saskatchewan*, a CEO Discussion Paper published on August 25, 2021 and available on Elections Saskatchewan's website at <https://www.elections.sk.ca/reports-data/reports-publications/>.

<sup>17</sup> For details, see section 261(2) of the Election Act.

<sup>18</sup> *The Constituency Boundaries Act, 1993*, SS 1993, c C-27.1.

<sup>19</sup> 2022 Saskatchewan Constituency Boundaries Commission. *Final Report* (Regina: Saskatchewan Constituency Boundaries Commission, October 2022). The report is available online at <https://www.saskboundaries.ca/reports/>.



New constituency boundary maps, including Saskatoon Composite, were produced during the 2022 Saskatchewan Constituency Boundaries Commission Review.

## DELIVERING BY-ELECTIONS

As part of its mandate, Elections Saskatchewan must be in a constant state of readiness to deliver unscheduled electoral events such as by-elections. Since s. 5.1 of the revised Election Act authorizes the use of new procedures, equipment, or technology in a by-election, it is also important to maintain a state of readiness to test new electoral management solutions when opportunities arise. This facilitates the ongoing progress of Elections Saskatchewan's modernization initiative, allowing for the testing of tools and processes before they are deployed in a general election.

### Saskatoon Meewasin

The Saskatoon Meewasin by-election, held on September 26, 2022, provided just such an opportunity. As Saskatchewan's first provincial by-election since September 12, 2018, this event allowed for the testing of important processes that have been developed but largely untried in Saskatchewan over the past four years.

On July 15, 2022, pursuant to s. 5.1(4)(a) of the Election Act, the CEO provided the Speaker and the Board of Internal Economy with a copy of three CEO Orders

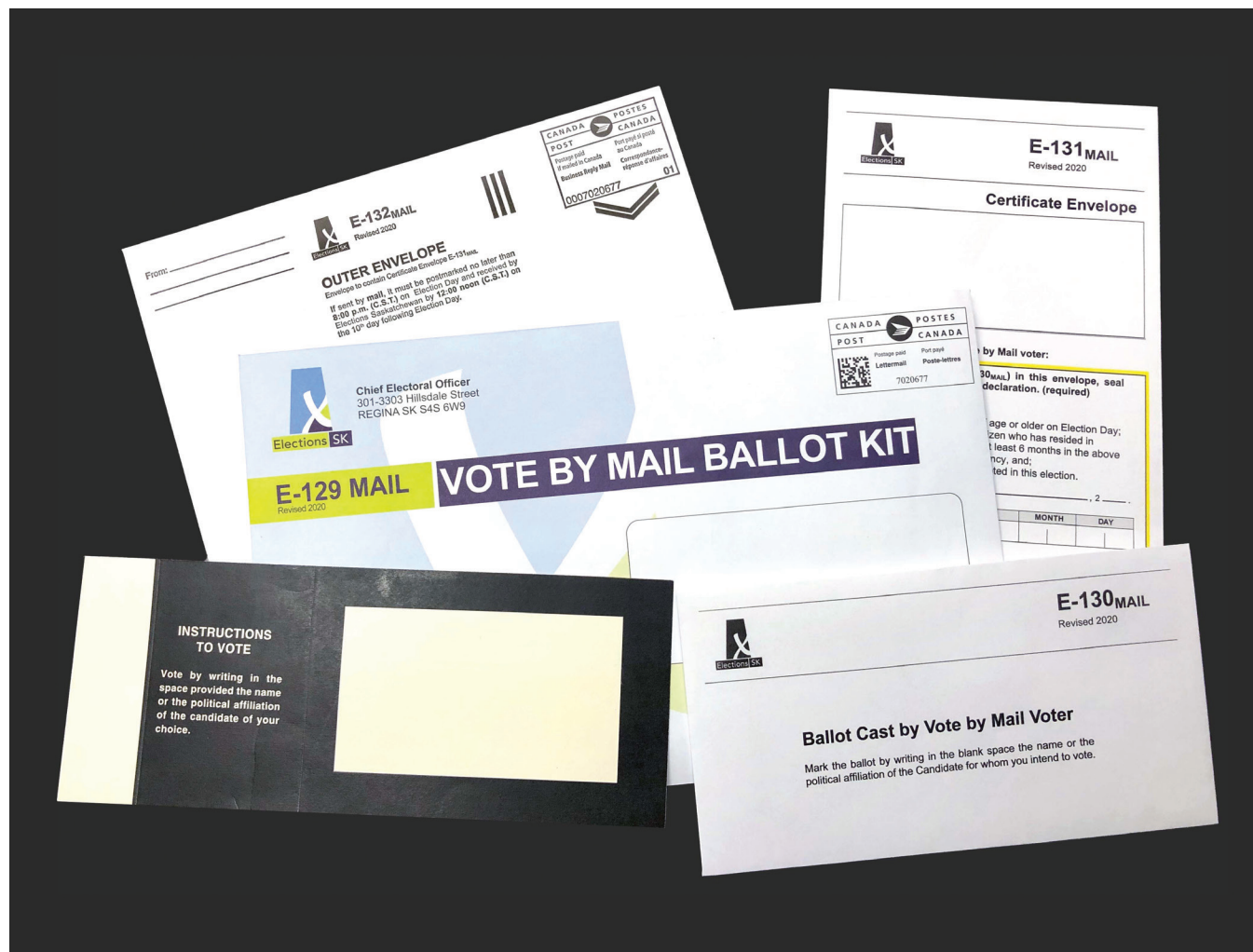


Laptops and scanners were used by election officials during the Saskatoon Meewasin by-election on September 26, 2022.

containing Directives allowing for the use of a revised Vote by Mail process, a combined Voting Record, and the elimination of the poll clerk position in the Saskatoon Meewasin by-election. The province's registered political parties also received a copy of the Orders attached to a CEO Communique.<sup>20</sup>

These pilot projects were a success. A brief summary of each is outlined below. Further details are outlined in the Chief Electoral Officer's comprehensive report on the Saskatoon Meewasin by-election, which was submitted to the Speaker and Board of Internal Economy on March 24, 2023.<sup>21</sup>

The **Vote by Mail procedure** employed in the Saskatoon Meewasin by-election was very similar to the process followed in the Twenty-Ninth General Election, with one improvement: voters were struck off when their Vote by Mail package was received at Elections Saskatchewan's head office, rather than when they first applied for the package. This provided greater protection against voting twice, while also ensuring that voters unable to use their Vote by Mail package for any reason could still vote in person. It also reduced the burden on both voters and election workers by minimizing the need for voter declarations. Traditional absentee voting was not offered in the by-election: instead, voters who arrived at the



A Vote by Mail option was once again employed during the Saskatoon Meewasin by-election on September 26, 2022.

returning office to vote were provided with Vote by Mail packages or advised of alternatives.

The revised Vote by Mail process was a success, bringing greater accessibility, robust electoral integrity, and a reduced workload for all participants. The process will continue to be piloted in upcoming by-elections, and the Chief Electoral Officer will advocate for its adoption in the Thirtieth General Election. In order to implement it, however, the CEO will need the consent of the Board of Internal Economy to introduce it via a CEO Directive.

A second process piloted in the by-election was the use of a **Voting Record**. With this simple but meaningful procedural adjustment, the voting list and poll book were combined into a single document. The traditional two-part process was appropriate in the past, when voter lists were assembled shortly before the election and document production required significant manual work, but current databases and technology make this unnecessary. The combined Voting Record does away with the need for a poll clerk to handwrite the voter's name and address after voting, reducing errors and increasing efficiency. In addition, a bar code associated with each voter permits rapid reporting on voter lists to political parties and candidates.

As modernization progresses, the Chief Electoral Officer anticipates that electronic poll books will be the first choice for the majority of polling locations. However, in polling locations with unreliable access to the internet, this paper-based Voting Record model offers an appropriate and practical improvement on the traditional process. As with the Vote by Mail Process, implementation of this improvement in a general election will require the consent of the Board of Internal Economy.

The final improvement made pursuant to s. 5.1 was **elimination of the poll clerk position**. The primary duty of a poll clerk is to write down each voter's name and address after voting. Integration of the poll book and voting list in the Voting Record make this position unnecessary. While a second person must still be present to assist the deputy returning officer with counting and recording the results, that role is easily filled by other election workers such as the supervisory deputy returning



Going forward, electronic pollbooks have the potential to significantly improve the voting process.

officer or information officer. Like the changes above, the removal of the poll clerk position will require the approval of the Board of Internal Economy in order to be implemented in a general election.

Drawing on s. 135.1 of the Election Act (as it then was), the Chief Electoral Officer also directed the use of **electronic poll books** in advance polls for the by-election.<sup>22</sup> This test was a success. Voting was more efficient, and political parties and candidates were able to access real-time data on who had voted.

Occasional difficulty scanning barcodes stored on voters' phones was a minor inconvenience that did not inhibit voting. However, issues with an intermittent internet connection at one location revealed the importance of matching processes employed at a polling location with the technology available at that location.

Going forward, electronic pollbooks have the potential to significantly improve the voting process. In order to truly gain these benefits in an event on the scale of a general election, however, it is important to pair them with electronic vote counting equipment that can keep pace with the more efficient process that accompanies electronic pollbooks. This equipment will be tested in upcoming by-elections.

<sup>20</sup> CEO Orders 2022-001 (Vote by Mail), 2022-0002 (Implementation of Voting Record), and 2022-003 (Elimination of Poll Clerk Position) are available on Elections Saskatchewan's website at <https://www.elections.sk.ca/candidates-political-parties/bulletins-circulars/#ceo-orders>.

<sup>21</sup> The Chief Electoral Officer's Saskatoon Meewasin Section 5.1 Report is available on Elections Saskatchewan's website at <https://www.elections.sk.ca/reports-data/reports-publications/>.

<sup>22</sup> Section 135.1 was subsequently repealed pursuant to Bill 123, *The Election Amendment Act*, 2022, s. 16.

## UPCOMING BY-ELECTIONS

The 2022–2023 fiscal year closed with three vacant seats in the Legislative Assembly. Though not yet scheduled, the by-elections for these three constituencies must be held by the dates set out below:

- **Regina Coronation Park:** must be filled by August 10
- **Lumsden-Morse:** must be filled by September 10
- **Regina Walsh Acres:** must be filled by September 28

These by-elections will provide further opportunity for testing processes and technology in advance of the next general election. On April 20, 2023, the Chief Electoral Officer submitted to the Speaker seven directives regarding the use of “alternate procedures, equipment, or technology” in the by-elections:

- implementation of a voting week (rather than discrete advance and election day voting periods);
- changes regarding polling divisions;
- elimination of the polling clerk at most voting locations;
- use of electronic poll books;
- use of vote counting equipment;
- a vote by mail process; and
- use of a voting record at locations that do not feature electronic poll books.

The 2023–2024 Annual Report will include a report on the outcome of these processes.

Pursuant to s. 5.1 of the Election Act, the CEO has authority to direct these pilot projects during by-elections. During a general election, however, similar directives cannot be issued without the approval of the Board of Internal Economy.

## ELECTION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The development of the new Saskatchewan Election Management System (SEMS) is an important step in improving the quality and efficiency of electoral processes going forward. While SEMS will certainly improve the experience of external stakeholders, its primary impact will be felt behind the scenes. It is specifically designed to address the unique logistical challenges associated with an election, such as hiring, training, paying, and releasing a large temporary workforce; sourcing, leasing, and managing hundreds of polling stations; handling ballots; and managing parties and candidates.

As planned, SEMS is on track to be election-ready within the 2023–2024 fiscal year:

- The **Task and Calendar Management** module is in place, following a successful trial in the February 2022 Athabasca by-election.
- The **Location Management** module is also ready and was successfully utilized in the Saskatoon Meewasin by-election in September 2022.
- Development is nearly complete on the **Worker Management** module, which includes timesheet and payroll functionality. It has already been used to process applications from Returning Officers for the next general election, with further testing underway.
- **Party and Candidate Management** is in development and scheduled for completion in the near future.
- Development continues on the **Ballot Management** module and the overall user interface and experience, which are on track for completion in the current fiscal year.

The upcoming by-elections will provide an excellent opportunity to test the system and identify any points for improvement before the next general election.

## MEASURING SUCCESS

Elections Saskatchewan completed its new strategic plan at the end of the 2022–2023 fiscal year. Measurement has not yet begun. Reporting on a series of performance measures will begin in the 2023–2024 Annual Report. Timely updates and reporting will be provided when appropriate for measures tied to the election cycle, the full term of the strategic plan, or Elections Saskatchewan’s long-term modernization initiative.



Elections Saskatchewan completed its new strategic plan at the end of the 2022–2023 fiscal year.



CEO Dr. Michael Boda hosted a meeting of representatives from Saskatchewan’s six registered political parties on June 10, 2022.



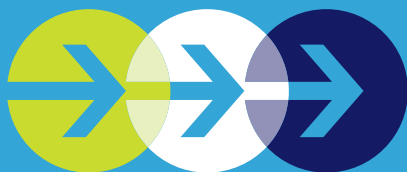
## Financial Summary

The work of an election management body differs fundamentally from that of most other public service organizations in that it operates on a four-year electoral cycle rather than an annual cycle. As such, it incurs costs associated with the ongoing operations of the institution as well as costs associated with the delivery of electoral events that happen either on a schedule set out in statute (i.e., general elections and boundary redistributions) or on-demand (i.e., by-elections and referenda). In most cases, the former expenditures will remain relatively constant over time while the latter costs will fluctuate and peak in the 12-month period that immediately follows a general election call.

A complete report of Elections Saskatchewan's expenditures for the 2022–2023 fiscal year, including audited financial statements, will be available on the Elections Saskatchewan website in the Corporate Reports and Publications section.<sup>23</sup>



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EXPANDING ELECTORAL  
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