

Elections Canada

Strategic Plan 2008–2013

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Annex

Strategic Framework 2008–2013

Message from the Chief Electoral Officer

In February 2007, I was honoured to be appointed Chief Electoral Officer of Canada by the House of Commons. I was entrusted to lead an organization staffed with dedicated professionals who possess an undeniable expertise in the administration of all aspects of the *Canada Elections Act*; I was struck by their commitment to our statutory mandate and to continuously improve its delivery.

It quickly became apparent that faced with an unpredictable election cycle – four general elections have been held in the last nine years – combined with significant ongoing legislative reforms, critical recruitment and staff retention challenges as well as a technology infrastructure that is quickly nearing the end of its useful life, the organization was under significant pressure to enhance its management capacity and invest in its long-term sustainability.

Following a review of our environment, both internal and external, we have designed a five-year strategic plan that identifies three strategic objectives and four critical enablers to ensure that Elections Canada continues to deliver its statutory mandate in a fair, transparent and effective manner. Our three strategic objectives of Trust, Accessibility and Engagement will ensure that Canadians continue to have confidence in their electoral process, participate actively in the selection of their representatives and thereby contribute to the overall health of Canada's democracy.

Enhancing and maintaining the integrity of our electoral process and Canadians' perception of it is at the core of our Strategic Plan. We will carry out the administration of statutory provisions in a consistent and predictable manner and improve quality assurance programs to attest to the integrity of the process. We will also carry out ongoing reviews of the increasing administrative and regulatory burden political entities face in complying with the *Canada Elections Act* and aim at meeting the purpose of the legislation without unduly restricting legitimate participation in the electoral system.

Canada's electoral process is grounded in participation, which in turn confers legitimacy on our governing institutions. Participation requires open access, and Elections Canada is committed to identify and remove barriers to participation. In that regard, as secure technological advances become more broadly available they offer opportunities to increase overall accessibility. As we embrace new technologies and provide more convenient methods of registration and voting, we will ensure that the integrity of the process is not compromised. As we proceed to improve access, we intend to seize the opportunity provided by the *Canada Elections Act*, which permits the Chief Electoral Officer to study and test alternative voting methods, including electronic voting processes for use during by-elections or general elections, with the prior approval of the appropriate committees of the House of Commons and the Senate.

In moving forward, we will need to foster the engagement of Canadians and their representatives in our efforts to make our electoral process more responsive to their needs and expectations. We will seek active involvement of Canadians, particularly those who are involved through political parties and as parliamentarians.

Our Strategic Plan will serve as a compass for the next five years as we are called upon to make the difficult choices that will sometimes be necessary to ensure that Canadians receive value for money in the programs we deliver. The plan will need to be supplemented by frameworks that will articulate our strategies in the areas of human resources, information technology, governance and communications, which are critical enablers in meeting our strategic objectives and in ensuring that Elections Canada continues to earn the confidence of Parliament and Canadians.

I Our Mandate

Elections Canada is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament. We must be prepared at all times to conduct a federal general election, by-election or referendum, administer the political financing provisions of the *Canada Elections Act*, monitor compliance and enforce electoral legislation. Elections Canada is also mandated to conduct voter education and information programs, and provide support to the independent boundaries commissions in charge of adjusting the boundaries of federal electoral districts following each decennial census. Finally, Elections Canada may carry out studies on alternative voting methods and, with the approval of Parliament, test electronic voting processes for future use during electoral events.

2 Our Mission

Ensuring that Canadians can exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate.

3 Our Values

Our day-to-day activities and decision making are guided by the following key values:

- a *knowledgeable* and *professional* workforce
- *transparency* in everything we do
- *responsiveness* to the needs of Canadians involved in the electoral process
- *cohesiveness* and *consistency* in administering the *Canada Elections Act*
- continuously earning and maintaining the *public's trust*
- *stewardship* and *accountability* in how we manage our resources

4 Our Vision

An accessible electoral framework that Canadians trust and use.

5 Our Environment

Our strategic objectives for the next five years are influenced by our environment, particularly the following elements.

5.1 Human Resources

Elections Canada has a permanent employee base of 330 people. However, it currently relies on casual, temporary and contract personnel and core staff overtime to prepare for and conduct electoral events, especially so when workload peaks. This situation creates high turnover among Elections Canada personnel who hold positions where electoral expertise is critical. This in turn makes knowledge transfer difficult and results in the agency having to continuously retrain parts of its workforce.

The succession of minority governments and significant electoral reforms have also placed high demands on agency personnel.

The combination of those pressures ultimately limit our organizational capacity to take on additional work resulting from electoral events or further electoral reforms. This is an area that will require close attention.

Another challenge comes from the task of recruiting some 180,000 additional temporary workers to support the electoral framework in the local Elections Canada offices across the country during a general election. This is a unique situation in which very few government organizations find themselves, and it calls for exploring innovative approaches to recruiting and training workers.

On the other hand, now that the Chief Electoral Officer appoints, on the basis of merit, returning officers who are responsible for conducting electoral events in each of the 308 electoral districts in Canada, a new opportunity exists to further professionalize the role of the returning officer and ensure that they are well prepared to assist us in achieving our strategic direction. In addition, there is an opportunity to enhance the role of the 30 field liaison officers who support the electoral operations on a regional level across Canada.

5.2 Constant Operational Readiness

A general election requires a master plan that outlines hundreds of tasks to be performed within a very short window of time in each of the 308 electoral districts and in Ottawa. Electors across the country must be provided with the same level of service while acknowledging local considerations.

This requires careful planning to ensure the rapid deployment of resources and flawless execution of activities for an electoral event, as Elections Canada does not have a permanent infrastructure in the field and there is no room for error and a very short period of time to execute the numerous statutory obligations.

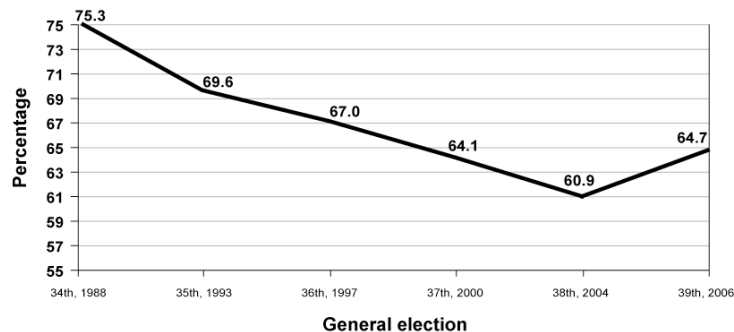
Since the 38th general election in 2004, we have been operating in the context of minority governments where a general election could take place at any time and, based on historical averages, could occur in a much shorter time frame than under majority governments. We must also implement new electoral legislation as well as plan and conduct by-elections as they occur.

As a consequence, we have been in a heightened state of election readiness since 2004. This has imposed a particular strain on the agency, monopolized most of our resources and left little room to tackle longer-term priorities. There are indications, given the results of the 39th general election and recent provincial elections, that minority governments may become more frequent occurrences in Canada. As such, Elections Canada must find a sustainable approach to adapt to this situation and maintain its organizational capacity over time.

In 2007, Bill C-16 *An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act* introduced fixed dates for the conduct of general elections, unless there is an earlier dissolution of Parliament. The benefits of fixed-date elections will be felt most in the context of majority governments. By removing much of the uncertainty that surrounds the timing of general elections, this change will improve our capacity to plan our readiness activities and allow us to distribute our workload more evenly over a longer period of time, thus lowering extraordinary demands on our personnel. Bill C-16 also presents other operational benefits that we will be exploring in due time.

5.3 Participation

Voter turnout has been on the decline for a number of years in many democratic countries due to various, often complex dynamics. Canada is no exception. From 1988 to 2004, the participation rate in Canadian federal elections decreased from 75.3 to 60.9 percent, before increasing to 64.7 percent in the 2006 general election.



Should this overall declining trend persist, it could affect the legitimacy of our democratic process. Responsibility for addressing declining voter turnout and participation in the electoral framework is shared by many. Several factors are at play, and many of these go well beyond the mandate of Elections Canada.

In this regard, Elections Canada can lead with a strategy that entails partnering with those who can help in engaging and educating groups that participate to a lesser extent in the electoral process.

Elections Canada can further assist by focusing on research, education and accessibility. Canadians must be aware of how they can engage in all facets of the electoral process, and research must be pursued to better understand the evolving factors that influence participation and to help us develop appropriate programs and initiatives. Elections Canada must also ensure – while maintaining the integrity of the system – that the barriers facing some groups of electors are reduced and, where possible, eliminated so that all electors have equitable access to the exercise of their democratic rights.

An aging population will mean looking at new ways of making the vote more easily accessible to seniors. Other groups also require our efforts in finding ways to ensure that they can better understand the electoral framework and the very important role they play in it. We need to look at ways of engaging youth and strengthening their connection with the electoral process. Their keen interest in new technologies and in global policy issues offers opportunities that can perhaps be leveraged, especially in the context where the Internet is omnipresent.

5.4 Maintaining Trust

One of the strengths of our electoral framework is that it incorporates numerous checks and balances. Electors, candidates, political parties, parliamentarians, the media and civil society, alongside Elections Canada, all play essential roles in monitoring and ensuring the integrity of the system. Part of a healthy democracy is the ability for all to voice openly their concerns about the electoral system. In recent years, Parliament and the media have raised questions about some aspects of the electoral framework, particularly related to the registration of electors, the identification of voters and political financing. Recent amendments to the *Canada Elections Act* have introduced measures, such as new voter identification requirements at the polls and tightened rules for political contributions and the financial activities of parties and candidates, in direct response to such concerns.

Elections Canada also plays a fundamental role in ensuring that Canadians continue to have the utmost confidence in their electoral framework. Part of this role is responding to questions raised about the system and its integrity. Another aspect is ensuring the quality and predictability of the administration of the electoral process so that all those who are involved are provided with consistent services, information and interpretations under the Act. We also have the duty to recommend to Parliament amendments to electoral legislation that would result in better administration of the Act. In addition, we have a responsibility to affirm the health of our electoral system. This is done by enhancing the transparency of all aspects of the process and by demonstrating that it is fair, inclusive and accessible to the entire Canadian electorate and others involved in the electoral framework.

On a different aspect of trust, it is also important to note that public service organizations currently operate in a climate of increased scrutiny linked to what some describe as an erosion of public confidence. More emphasis is now put on the accountability of public service managers, and reporting requirements to central agencies have increased. Building on the 2005 report from the Auditor General, which highlighted our strengths and made some recommendations for improvement, we are undertaking specific management initiatives such as establishing performance management frameworks to continue providing Canadians and Parliament with a transparent account of how we manage the electoral process and how we make the best use of resources to do so.

5.5 Electoral Reforms

Another of the strengths of our electoral framework has been its capacity to adapt to the evolving needs of Canadians, to facilitate access and to maintain a level playing field among political entities.

The process of electoral reform has been constant in Canada for over 15 years. This has provided a vehicle through which our electoral framework has evolved to respond to Canadians and Parliament's concerns.

As changes are considered by Parliament, Elections Canada provides expert advice and detailed impact analysis. Once legislation is passed, we must provide for the implementation of provisions within the time frames set by Parliament.

When changes to the legislation that govern the electoral framework are profound, such as the review of the political financing regime that resulted from Bill C-24, *An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act (political financing)*, which came into force in 2004, we continue to monitor the application of the legislation. It is through this work that we can formulate recommendations to Parliament to further improve the electoral framework.

When the process of electoral reform intensifies (eight government bills have been tabled within the first session of the 39th Parliament) the demand on Elections Canada becomes substantial, especially in a minority government context where most of our resources are occupied in maintaining a constant state of election readiness or engaged in matters arising from previous general elections.

Elections Canada must be prepared as further reforms to the electoral framework are considered. We must take stock of the most recent changes made to this framework, evaluate their impacts and consolidate their foundation. We also intend to look at ways we can better support the legislator and aim to develop flexible technology and processes that allow us to rapidly adapt to our changing environment.

5.6 Longer-term Planning

The imperatives of election readiness and the conduct of more general elections over a shorter period under minority governments unavoidably impact Elections Canada's ability to focus on its long-term direction. Over time, this can leave the agency vulnerable and make adapting to change more difficult. Without a longer-term focus, there is also a risk that the agency may be put in a position to catch up with its environment and miss out on some opportunities. Guided by this new Strategic Plan, Elections Canada intends to address this challenge by reinforcing and further integrating its business and human resources planning while ensuring that longer-term objectives can be pursued even through the conduct of electoral events.

5.7 Regulatory Framework

Canada's electoral regime has seen the introduction of a complex, sophisticated and detailed regulatory framework over the years seeking to enhance accountability and transparency of political entities. Elections Canada is the guardian of this system; it is tasked with the responsibilities of monitoring activities, reviewing and, at times, auditing financial returns and seeking appropriate corrections and, where warranted, referring matters to the Commissioner of Canada Elections for investigation.

In carrying out its responsibilities in this area, Elections Canada has developed a number of tools and delivered training programs to help political entities understand the statutory requirements and facilitate their compliance. The complexity and demands of the regulatory regime are nonetheless daunting and causing many to hesitate becoming financial or official agents; in fact, many entities are pointing to the regulatory burden as overwhelming.

Yet the regulatory framework and the transparency associated with it play a critical role in the public trust regarding political entities. It is expected that the political financing regulatory framework will continue to evolve significantly over time, as evidenced by the recent adoption of the *Federal Accountability Act* and the introduction in 2007 of Bill C-54 dealing with political loans.

This rapid evolution imposes additional responsibilities on and challenges for Elections Canada. While the agency does not set regulations as such, it does – through all manner of administrative decisions such as the adoption of interpretations and positions – set precedents on discretionary matters that affect political entities. In its role, Elections Canada must first ensure that the administrative requirements are tailored and smart, that they facilitate compliance, provide for an efficient process and do not unduly detract political entities from carrying out their core activities. At the same time, it must continue to ensure a level of integrity in the system that warrants ongoing public confidence.

6 Our Strategic Objectives

After having taken into consideration the various elements of our environmental scan and our vision statement, we have selected the following three strategic objectives. These will be the focus of Elections Canada for the next five years.

Trust

To maintain and strengthen the recognition among Canadians, whether they are electors or other participants in the electoral process, that we administer the Canada Elections Act in a fair, consistent, effective and transparent manner.

Accessibility

To increase accessibility of the electoral process by testing innovative ways to vote and offering electors additional ways to register.

Engagement

- (a) *To increase young Canadians' understanding of the importance of voting and becoming candidates in elections*
- (b) *To work more collaboratively with parliamentarians and political parties in further strengthening the electoral process*

The following sections describe our three objectives in more detail.

6.1 Trust

To maintain and strengthen the recognition among Canadians, whether they are electors or other participants in the electoral process, that we administer the Canada Elections Act in a fair, consistent, effective and transparent manner.

Canadians benefit from an electoral framework that is recognized internationally for its integrity.

Elections in Canada take place without serious incident. They unfold in an orderly fashion; Canadians do not fear for their personal safety when they exercise their right to vote, and overall results are not disputed. This speaks to the high level of trust Canadians have for their electoral process and the work of Elections Canada. This trust needs to be safeguarded, and we must ensure that the proper checks and balances are in place to reinforce and sustain the integrity of our electoral system.

Driven by case law, public inquiries and multiple legislative initiatives, the burden of meeting regulatory requirements has grown exponentially in the last 10 years. Elections Canada must ensure that regulatory requirements are known and understood by all those to whom they apply and that it will act transparently, consistently and predictably in implementing them. We must monitor compliance, and where non-compliance is detected, we must act swiftly but fairly to sanction and deter it. At the same time, we must review compliance requirements and processes to assess their ongoing relevance, and where certain thresholds of materiality and relevance are not met, adopt administrative changes or recommend legislative amendments.

In this context, it is more important than ever that Elections Canada be an efficient, innovative and transparent organization.

Strategic initiatives

During the next five years, our key strategies for supporting this objective are to:

- assess the regulatory framework and propose opportunities for streamlining
- expand our training programs and tools for political entities, Elections Canada employees and election workers
- improve the communication of legal interpretation and expand the use of information bulletins
- explore with political parties and parliamentarians how we can further instill trust in the electoral framework
- further strengthen our ability to evaluate and ensure the quality and auditability of the electoral process

6.2 Accessibility

To increase accessibility of the electoral process by testing innovative ways to vote and offering electors additional ways to register.

One of the first things that may come to mind when considering this objective is registration and voting by electronic means. Various forms of technology-assisted registration and voting are already in use in a number of jurisdictions, both in Canada and around the world. Some experiences have been positive while others have raised serious concerns about the integrity of the systems used.

Ultimately, Elections Canada's goal is to provide Canadians, within the framework set by the legislation, an opportunity to choose among additional methods to register (add their name to the voters list) and vote where, how and when it is most convenient for them.

To achieve this end state, we must research and seize opportunities brought about by rapidly evolving technology.

We are committed to introduce additional ways to serve electors and provide them with options, both conventional and technological, to register and vote. To that purpose, we need to work collaboratively with Parliament to take full advantage of the provision in the *Canada Elections Act* (s. 18.1) that allows the Chief Electoral Officer to carry out studies on alternative voting methods and test electronic voting processes for future use during general elections or by-elections, subject to the prior approval of the appropriate parliamentary committees. As we learn from these pilots, there will be opportunities to explore with Parliament further enabling legislation.

While there is little doubt that we must take advantage of the possibilities that are now available, we must also ensure that new technologies serve the pursuit of a barrier-free electoral framework and maintain Canadians' trust in their electoral system. Care must be exercised as well not to exclude Canadians who do not have access to technology or do not use it. This is why additional methods that are considered or introduced will complement traditional methods of registering and voting. Opportunities may also exist to improve access for some groups, such as people with disabilities, those with special needs, young electors or those who are away from their electoral district or temporarily living abroad. Furthermore, we will ensure that new methods are secure and reliable.

In addition, we must make certain that we use proven technology. The right technology, when well used, will make registration and voting more accessible, safeguard the integrity of the electoral framework and possibly contribute to re-engaging a number of Canadians in the electoral framework..

This is a long-term change. It will require much testing and validation as well as education of electors and the engagement of political entities and other stakeholders. Canada's geography, its diversity and demographic trends all call for technological innovation that will assist in maintaining or improving public trust and make the electoral framework better aligned with social and demographic trends.

Strategic initiatives

Our key strategies to support this objective in the next five years are to:

- research and monitor technological trials and innovations in other jurisdictions, both in Canada and internationally
- implement a registration process that allows electors to register in person, by mail, telephone or Internet anytime and anywhere
- with the prior approval of Parliament, test a secure voting process during a by-election that allows electors to vote by telephone or Internet
- continue working with other electoral management bodies to leverage existing work as it relates to accessibility and the introduction of new technologies to support the electoral framework

6.3 Engagement

(a) To increase young Canadians' understanding of the importance of voting and becoming candidates in elections

As highlighted by our research and environmental scan, declining voter participation and low electoral engagement raise fundamental questions about the future sustainability of our democratic institutions. Most alarming is the low level of engagement from young Canadians, which as research has shown may not reverse with age. The low participation of youth also appears to cross various segments of the population, such as Aboriginal, ethnocultural and special needs youth.

Although the exercise of democratic rights is ultimately a personal responsibility and decision, studies indicate that a key factor explaining youth disengagement comes from their lack of understanding of the importance of voting and becoming a candidate. In the area of engagement, we intend to make this objective the primary focus of Elections Canada's efforts in the next five years.

Strategic initiatives

To achieve this objective, the following strategies will be pursued over the next five years:

- work collaboratively with political parties, current and former parliamentarians, education authorities and other Canadian electoral jurisdictions to conduct targeted civic education for Canadians under 18 years of age
- deepen our knowledge of youth engagement and pursue a comprehensive analysis of current information and programs
- increase our knowledge of the dynamics surrounding youth participation in various segments of the population, particularly as it relates to Aboriginal, ethnocultural and special needs youth
- identify and work with key external partners such as provincial and territorial chief electoral officers and others who are involved in engaging and educating youth
- research and identify best practices from other jurisdictions

(b) To work more collaboratively with parliamentarians and political parties in further strengthening the electoral framework

Electors, candidates, political parties, Parliament and Elections Canada all contribute in making the Canadian electoral regime a model for other democracies. This collaboration is a living process. It is sustained by common goals and expressed in various forums. Periodically, there is opportunity to revisit how we can better co-operate with others involved in the electoral system to ensure that the strengthening of the electoral framework remains a collaborative effort. True co-operation is achieved through recognition of every player's independence, authority and distinct competence. It also requires openness, trust, consultation and constructive engagement.

The rapid succession of general elections combined with the introduction and timely implementation of electoral reforms create a dynamic environment, which has reduced opportunities for discussion on key matters with others involved in the electoral framework. Elections Canada is committed in the next five years to explore and implement new approaches to work more closely with parliamentarians and political parties.

Strategic initiatives

Strategic initiatives to achieve this objective are to:

- review the mandate and composition of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties so that it continues meeting the needs of participants and those of Elections Canada
- explore ways to better support Parliament in its consideration of electoral reforms
- more effectively consult parliamentarians and political parties and provide for additional consultation methods
- assess the most recent changes made to the electoral framework, evaluate their impacts and provide recommendations to Parliament to consolidate their foundation

7 Key Strategic Plan Enablers

To address the challenges of our environment and succeed in achieving our strategic objectives, we have identified several enablers. These consist of four pillars that will support our success and will warrant their own internal action plans for the next five years. Without them, we would not be able to move forward on our strategic agenda and ensure the conduct of quality electoral events. These areas are:

- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Governance
- Communications

7.1 Human Resources

Most organizations will say that their strength is their people. This is also very true at Elections Canada. Our workforce is dedicated and committed and without them, quality administration of elections and electoral legislation could not be attained.

Like many organizations, we struggle with key human resources challenges, such as providing work–life balance, offering career developmental opportunities, providing sufficient time for training and competing for smaller pools of qualified candidates. These factors are exacerbated by the specific environment of Elections Canada, especially in the last few years when the agency has been operating at capacity and beyond to keep up with the requirements of minority governments and legislative reform. It is easy to understand under such conditions that Elections Canada struggles with attracting, recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of qualified personnel to carry out its activities. The succession planning for key agency positions, some of which have been held by the same experts for many years, also presents a key challenge.

Elections Canada needs to respond by setting out a detailed, well-thought-out and proactive plan to deal with human resources issues over the next five years to ensure that we are prepared to face the next ten.

This will no doubt require us to develop creative ways of attracting talent and to adopt innovative recruitment initiatives such as targeting university recruits. We must implement programs that not only improve career development but provide better work–life balance as well.

We will also invest more in training to ensure that our staff continues to possess the skills and expertise they need to adapt to the challenges of an ever-changing environment.

In addition, we will explore strategies to stabilize our workforce and augment organizational capacity, especially in areas where we currently rely on temporary employees and contractors to ensure the preservation of our corporate know-how.

We also intend to continue favouring learning opportunities with other electoral management bodies in Canada and in other countries to strengthen our expertise.

Our human resources strategy must also make room for returning officers and field liaison officers who, while not Elections Canada employees, play an increasingly important role in the delivery of electoral events in Canada. Since 2007, the Chief Electoral Officer appoints returning officers on merit. Our human resources action plan will also address how to further professionalize this important group.

Our strategy must extend to election workers in local Elections Canada offices and at the polls. We need to work with political parties and candidates to ensure these key positions are staffed with workers who can continue meeting the service expectations of Canadians.

7.2 Information Technology

Over the past decade, Elections Canada has embraced the use of information technology (IT) and developed a unique IT environment. However, while the current technology has served us well, our IT infrastructure and systems are nearing the end of their lifespan and must be replaced. Proceeding with replacements must be carefully planned and executed as the agency's capacity to conduct electoral events at all times cannot be compromised.

Over the next few years, Elections Canada will be making substantial investments in IT to ensure that new technology improves services to those involved with the electoral framework. The result will be a new IT environment that is simplified, takes full advantage of modern information and communications technology, provides improved business capability with the same high reliability during events as in the past and fulfills our IT requirements for the longer term.

This new IT environment is a critical enabler to our strategic objectives – especially in the area of accessibility where providing Canadians with additional ways to register and vote is dependent on a robust, integrated and flexible IT infrastructure. There are also opportunities for technology to increase trust in the electoral system by increasing the integrity and auditability of the process.

Finally, technology offers avenues to strengthen our internal systems, improve our knowledge and information management, and ensure that our management is supported by timely, accurate and easily accessible information.

7.3 Governance

Another key success factor in delivering our mandate and this Strategic Plan is governance. We must empower our staff. This is not simply about delegation. It is about ensuring that employees and managers, returning officers and field liaison officers have the training, the tools and the support they need to make good decisions. It is also about providing them with the required resources for implementation. In addition, we need to rely on clear lines of business, roles and responsibilities across the organization.

With empowerment comes accountability, which needs to be coupled with a strong planning cycle and a solid management framework. Elections Canada intends on strengthening its business planning framework so that managers at all levels of the agency understand how their work and that of their teams contribute to achieving our strategic objectives. We will also establish a performance management framework to improve the measurement and communication of our results.

Opportunities also exist to consider and introduce new elements of external governance. As indicated earlier, we intend to review the Advisory Committee of Political Parties so that it continues meeting both Elections Canada's needs as well as those of the political parties. We will also assess the need and opportunity for establishing other forums where necessary to help us carry out our mandate. The possibility of setting up an external management advisory board to provide advice on our planning and key initiatives will be explored. We are also committed to set up the necessary audit framework and committee structure required as a result of the new Treasury Board policy and the *Federal Accountability Act*.

7.4 Communications

Each one of our strategic objectives contains a strong communications component. Elections Canada's goal is to establish dialogue through every facet of its work. This means better understanding the needs of those involved in the electoral framework, to offer services that respond to their expectations within the framework set out by the legislation. This is especially important in an environment of constant electoral reform where fundamental changes to the electoral process must be implemented and communicated.

Barrier-free accessibility cannot be achieved without Elections Canada understanding where those barriers might be, and in turn communicating how we propose to solve them. Engagement and trust are not possible without this two-way communication. Our communications framework will detail the various consultative committees we will set up, the research agenda, various publications and other products we will develop and how we intend to improve our overall external communications.

We also intend to look at how our internal communications must be adapted to support the objectives of this plan and support the changes we make to our governance.

8 Conclusion

This Strategic Plan lays our foundation for the next five years at Elections Canada.

As we launch into our annual planning cycle, the objectives pursued by this plan, along with the continuous outcomes we are committed to deliver to Canadians, will drive our business planning, activities and projects. We will describe through our annual reports to Parliament the results we achieve in reaching these objectives.

This plan has been shared with all Elections Canada personnel, both in the field and in Ottawa. We will also ensure that it is well communicated to all those who are involved in the electoral framework and affected by our work, including electors, political parties, parliamentarians and other partners.

If need be, we will adjust our Strategic Plan to deal with unforeseen circumstances that might arise during the five-year period.