Regional Post-Mortem Meetings

with

Returning Officers

40th General Election

Executive Summary

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40TH GENERAL ELECTION – 2008
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November and December, thirteen regional post-mortem meetings were held across Canada. All 308 returning officers (RO) and all field liaison officers (FLO) were invited to participate. The meetings were facilitated by Elections Canada managers.

The purpose of the post-mortem meetings was to review what went well during the 40th general election and to identify areas where improvements can be made. A thorough analysis of the minutes from each of the thirteen regional meetings has been conducted and a detailed summary report prepared.

On the last afternoon of each session, the groups worked through exercises to identify five short-term priorities and five long-term priorities to present to Elections Canada headquarters (ECHQ) for consideration. The top five short-term and long-term priorities are listed below.

SHORT-TERM PRIORITIES – TARGET DATE: SEPTEMBER 1, 2009

1.   High-speed connectivity for RO offices

Connectivity was discussed in all thirteen sessions. The opinion of the returning officers was unanimous - "Dial-up is unacceptable; high speed connectivity is mandatory." Twelve of the 13 sessions identified high-speed connectivity as one of their top five priorities.

In discussing the challenges of a dial-up connection, ROs note that they often cannot open files that are sent to them, which impacts productivity as an extraordinary amount of time is wasted trying to retrieve memos (meaning that a lot of memos are not read in a timely manner) and answer EMS questions. Because of the tight timeframes we work within, high speed connectivity is critical for efficiency. GeoExplore is a wonderful tool, but it is useless when using dial-up connection.

If a dial-up connection is used again during the next event, EC will need to develop best practices regarding transmission of emails to the RO office, taking into account file sizes, location of attachments and folders, etc., as well as the limitations of dial-up connections.

2.   Geography and Sites assignment

ROs in 12 of the 13 sessions discussed the need for undertaking pre-event assignments as soon as possible after 40th general election, while events are still fresh in memory. These tasks would include:

- Geography – there are quickly changing demographics that need to be accounted for:
    - polling divisions - review and adjust polling division boundaries to deal with areas where elector numbers are very high or very low;
    - advance polling districts – increase the number of advance polling districts (that is, reduce the number of polling divisions in each advance poll district) to make the advance poll volumes more manageable;
    - mobile polls – review business rules and reassess mobile poll needs of the electoral district (ED);
    - provide ROs a chance to review rural addressing issues (for example: street names, municipality names, etc.);
    - poll key clean-up;update maps (remove railway lines no longer in use, add areas of new development, etc.)

- Polling sites –
    - opportunity for ROs (and AAROs if applicable) to visit their polling sites to review suitability and to identify new sites where required (especially important for new ROs who have never carried out a site review assignment);
    - identify alternate polling sites (ROs are facing more resistance to the use of schools and churches as sites);
- Long-term care facilities –
    - develop rapport with long-term care administrators and establish processes for revision and letters of attestation, ID rules, etc.
- Hospitals –
    - develop rapport with hospital administrators and establish processes for special ballot voting, ID rules, etc.
- Supplies management –
    - review planned supplies and materials quantities for the next election and adjust as needed (for example: nomination papers, materials for Aboriginals, French vs. English quantities, etc.);
- Training key office staff –
    - Revision supervisor

It was agreed that not all EDs would be required to carry out a detailed review of the above tasks. ROs should be allowed to identify their priorities and to customize their assignments. EC should recognize that resources and the time required for pre-event assignments will vary according the ED's profile.
ROs are hopeful that in the near future, pre-writ assignments will include the time and materials required to train some of the key office staff. The 'self-training and evaluation package' for special ballot coordinators received very favorable reviews and ROs encourage the development of similar packages for other positions and suggest that these packages be distributed for pre-writ training once an election becomes imminent.

3. **Updating all manuals, tools, materials and training methods; developing a solid *Train-the-Trainer* Program**

ROs agree that effective training of election officials is key to a successful event. Nine of the thirteen sessions reported that updating and improving the training materials and methods should immediately become priority.

The general feeling is that the DRO and poll clerk training is too long and too widespread. The recommendation is that the DRO training be focused on the typical voting scenario at the polling station as well as the closing procedures. Using hands-on exercises, under the guidance of the training officer, as the primary method of instruction, the participants would learn by doing. The training session should be task-oriented, repeatedly demonstrating how to use the quick reference guide, the statement of the vote, the closing instructions checklist and the DRO manual as reference tools throughout polling day. A DVD depicting instances of a typical voting process would be valuable as well.

ROs feel the DRO manual needs to be simplified. The quick reference guides and the closing instructions checklist were well received and the ROs would like to see the manual redesigned with more instructions of this type. Checklists, flowcharts and visual references would be more effective than a textbook-style presentation.

Many ROs agree with the suggestion of providing more thorough training to the CPSs and empowering them to handle the exceptions to the typical elector scenario.
It was noted that all of the poll official manuals and lesson plans need to be updated and presented in a consistent format.

ROs would like to see a formal *Train the Trainer* program for training officers delivered between elections. A refresher course could be provided regionally just before an election or in the first week or two of the event. "Training officers need to understand what they are teaching!" and be able to answer questions from the class participants.

4. Provide more support to the Recruitment Officer in the RO office

ROs in six of the thirteen post-mortem meetings felt strongly that the enormous challenge of recruiting many hundreds of election workers should be more firmly supported. Recommendations include implementing national recruitment initiatives, enabling an earlier start to recruitment in the office, establishing a "recruitment department" in the RO office, and developing recruitment tools and a recruitment manual.

The EC website application form was discussed in 10 of the post-mortem sessions and received positive remarks from everyone. ROs would like the application to capture more information about the applicant, such as address (to establish which area of the ED), email address, previous election experience, work experience, and confirmation of Canadian citizenship, etc. ROs encourage EC to promote on-line applications in national advertising and perhaps bearing an inducement on the Voter Information Card such as "Interested in polling day employment? Apply at www.elections.ca." Applications should be sent directly to an email account for recruitment officers.

ROs made suggestions as to how EC can help ROs increase the pool of potential election officials. They encourage EC to further partnerships with provincial election organizations to enhance and facilitate the sharing of names of potential workers. ROs strongly support changes to the *Canada Elections Act* which would sanction the hiring of 16 and 17-year olds as information officers and poll clerks. Some ROs suggested that EC should negotiate an agreement with Human Resources Development Canada to consider election-related income as "exempt" from EI clawbacks. This would allow for a wider range of workers and would provide work experience for those who most need it.

Generally, ROs agree that the recruiting process must begin as early as possible. Overall, ROs are receiving fewer names from candidates and political parties and the quality of the candidates whose names are received varies from fair to poor. It is recommended that EC work towards abolishing the candidates' privilege of providing names of election officials. If this is non-negotiable, ROs strongly recommend setting the deadline for submitting those names to the RO at a much earlier date in the calendar (suggested by Day 29). Most EDs require over 600 people to fill polling day positions and ROs find that they have to be in 'recruitment mode' throughout the full thirty-six days to ensure all positions are filled and everyone is trained.

In 8 of the thirteen sessions, ROs mentioned that the recruitment officer is one of the key staff positions in the office. They also agreed that a team effort is required to find and train qualified election officers. Most ROs feel that, given the vital importance of the recruitment officer position, the number of hours and pay rate should be increased. Many ROs supported the idea of a "Recruitment Department" in the RO office, including a recruitment co-ordinator/supervisor and recruitment officers working together with office clerks, training officers, financial officer and inventory/shipping clerk.

Bearing in mind the massive challenge of recruiting so many people within just a few weeks, ROs agree that the recruitment team needs a set of tools to better support their efforts. They need a computer with access to ROPS, an email address and telephones equipped with headsets and voice mail. ROs would like to see a recruiting manual designed for the recruiting officer. The manual should include the various polling day positions and descriptions, hiring guidelines and checklists, step-by-step instructions on the recruiting process, tips on how to sensitively refuse an applicant, EC policy and procedure for maintaining "do not hire" lists, screening tools that can be used before a worker is trained, etc. Most RO offices do not use ROPS as the main source of tracking polling day workers (see recommendation 5 under Long-Term Priorities). ROs encourage EC to create a working spreadsheet for the recruitment officer, which can be uploaded directly into ROPS.

5. Increased outreach activity by CROs between events and during pre-writ period

The need for more community outreach was identified as a short-term priority by ROs in 3 of the thirteen sessions. The recommendation is that EC maintain an ongoing outreach program between elections. A three-week period during an event is not sufficient to get messages out effectively.

In particular, ROs would like to see their Aboriginal Community Relations Officers maintain face-to-face relationships in these communities between events and aboriginal groups supported this idea as well.

ROs also see a benefit in providing ongoing information to students and youth. Regular outreach to 15 to 17 year olds is vital to start building the relationship with the next generation of voters and election workers. ROs noted that there is not enough information for student electors, especially since youth are a focus in EC's strategic plan.

Once an election becomes imminent, many ROs would like to be able to speak to service and seniors groups, to start building relationships with, and distribute information to, universities and ethnic communities, etc. This will help 'get the message out' prior to an election.

LONG-TERM PRIORITIES – BEYOND SEPTEMBER 2009

6. Comprehensive review of Tariff of Fees

A recommendation emerging from every post-mortem session is that it is time for a comprehensive review of the *Tariff of Fees*. ROs are dissatisfied with the pay scales currently established under the *Tariff* and strongly recommend a review of all positions required for an election, their relevance, and an adjustment of pay rates. ROs feel that most positions are underpaid in comparison with local rates of pay and agree that our rates must be competitive to attract qualified individuals. Many ROs believe the current pay rates exacerbate the challenge of recruiting polling day workers.

In some sessions, ROs discussed the pros and cons of paying staff and election workers hourly fees versus flat rates. For example, some ROs suggested that DROs and poll clerks for advance polls should be paid an hourly rate rather than a flat rate, based on 28 hours. The reality is that these workers work 9+ hours each of the three days of advance voting which equals the 28 hours they are paid. They must also count the ballots on election night. In most cases, the advance poll boxes have more ballots than most ordinary polls, so the counting of the advance ballots takes longer and the DRO and poll clerk are essentially working for free that evening.

Several returning officers also raised the fact that they are required to work beyond the event (checking emails, receiving phone calls related to their work from EC and other stakeholders) for which they are not compensated. ROs would like to be paid a monthly stipend to account for the ongoing commitment and time required.

7. Open RO office one week earlier

The idea of starting the set-up of the RO office one week earlier was discussed at 10 of the post-mortem sessions and ROs were unanimous in their support. Eight of those groups feel it is one of the top priorities. For the 40th general election, some ROs were able to begin their office set-up before the writ was issued, for which they were appreciative.

If and when a majority government is in power and with fixed election dates, it will be possible to start earlier and to have most RO offices fully functional and ready to serve electors and candidates by Day 36.

Some ROs suggested that a minority government scenario should call for a 43-day calendar, with voting by special ballot and RO offices open to the public as of Day 36. The first 7 days would be intended for set-up only. Furniture and equipment, phones and computers could be fully installed and ready when they open to the public.

This would also allow time to train office staff, special ballot coordinators and revision supervisors. It would be useful to receive and organize the first shipment of materials before the office opens. The extra week would also allow time to set up AARO offices so that they are fully functional when they open to the public on Day 36.

8. Voter Information Cards: direct printing elector and address information

ROs are almost unanimous in their support for printing the variable elector name and address information directly on the Voter Information Cards. ROs were quick to note that when this is the standard procedure, they still want the chance to perform quality control checks on the VICs before they are introduced into the mail system.

It is hoped that supplying address labels for tens for thousands of cards would soon be a thing of the past. The $500 budget intended to pay for this task to be carried out by an individual group is not sufficient and most ROs usually use many staff hours to get the job done.

9. Computer hardware and software in RO and AARO offices

Although the new hardware in the RO offices was greatly appreciated, most ROs still feel that more attention to hardware and software in the office is required. Six of the thirteen groups listed this as a priority item.

All ROs with AARO offices strongly recommend that AARO offices need computers and high-speed internet connection linked to the RO office. AAROs need email so they can receive memos directly from ECHQ, and to aid in communications with the RO office. AARO offices should be doing their own revisions in REVISE, which should be linked to the RO office to keep the database current. They should also be able to access ROPS/SITES through the RO office.

The absence of a computer in the RO office during the first few days of an event is quite limiting. Many ROs suggested that if ROs had laptop computers at home, rather than a PC, the laptop could be used at the office until the LAN is running. ROs would also like to have one or two more printers as well as a scanner in each office. Most ROs experienced frustration sending faxes to ECHQ and feel that scanning and emailing documents would increase efficiency in communicating with headquarters, candidates, electors and election day workers. ROs would like some of the thin clients equipped with a USB port for a memory stick.

Recommendations regarding software include adding Outlook and PowerPoint to the suite of *Office* applications. ROs would prefer to work with Outlook for email rather than web-based email where the folders are very cumbersome and difficult to work with. Many ROs expressed frustration regarding the limited functionality of Word and Excel on the office computers. Word, Excel, Outlook and PowerPoint
should have more standard office functionality (for example, right-click functions enabled, notification if someone else has the document open, etc.) ROs try to hire staff with strong basic office skills, so applications should be the standard version to ensure ease and efficiency. The Outlook functions for email and the calendar would greatly improve the efficiency of the ROs.

In 10 of the thirteen sessions, ROs encouraged the addition of email accounts for all key staff (ex: ARO350XX@elections.ca), including ARO, AARO, training officer, financial officer, automation coordinator, revision supervisor, special ballot coordinator, recruitment officer, inventory/shipping clerk, office coordinator and community relations officers. Most ROs felt that the RO must be copied on all emails to their team.

10. ROPS: add a strong recruitment management component

The vast majority of recruitment officers did not use ROPS as their main source of tracking employees (especially given that they would not have access to this system on election day). Recruitment officers are currently building a parallel database to work from and the data will be later entered in ROPS by the financial officer.

The need for a user-friendly 'recruitment tracking/management' application was discussed in 8 of the thirteen sessions. Again, the recruitment of so many election workers in a few weeks is a huge challenge. ROs would like EC to develop a component within ROPS or an application that is compatible with ROPS to assist the recruitment team. The application should track recruiting, training and placement of workers and carry this information into the payment component of ROPS. ROPS should allow more than one user at a time, and user profiles would be set up for the various office staff who would be working with ROPS, based on the components they would access, such as data entry, reporting and read-only look-up.

This new recruitment management component should include functions for tracking potential workers, recording contact information, contacts made, assignment of workers and vacancies at a glance, etc. ROs would like to see a solid tutorial within the application to ensure quick learning and users who will maximize the features of the software. A planning tool for ROs to use at the start of the event, to determine the number of workers needed and the locations of the jobs (information integrated from SITES component) is also recommended. Once AAROs have computers and high-speed connectivity, their offices should be accessing ROPS through the RO office server and using the ROPS recruitment module to manage recruitment for their region.

EVALUATION OF THE REGIONAL POST-MORTEM MEETINGS

At the end of each session, ROs were encouraged to complete an evaluation form. The feedback was very positive. The majority of ROs felt that the meeting objectives were achieved; potential solutions were identified for common problems and issues that occur as a result of existing procedures and legislation. Most ROs expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share best practices and to learn from other ROs.

ROs appreciated the fact that all ROs were invited to attend, and participation in each session was good. They felt the meetings were well organized and managed. All facilitators received high praise for their leadership and knowledge. ROs recognized that the facilitators encouraged participation from everyone and appreciated that they also tried to prevent individual ROs to dominate discussions or to focus solely on individual issues. The EC managers set a tone that allowed honest and frank discussion.

ROs took advantage of the opportunity to network and many commented on the value of the exchange of best practices. Many ROs continued discussions during breaks and after the sessions to further learn from one another. The fact that other ROs experienced the same challenges and frustrations reassured many new ROs.

The meeting agenda followed the progression of an election and ROs were pleased that EC was receptive to their recommendations and solutions. Most ROs feel that EC is listening and hope to see ROs included in the development of solutions on an on-going, regular and significant basis. A few ROs expressed a lack of confidence that the RO recommendations will be implemented. Some ROs mentioned they would like to receive an 'update' on the issues raised during the sessions.

Overall, ROs felt that the regional post-mortem meetings were worthwhile. Most stated that they would support similar meetings on a more regular basis, to continue learning from and supporting each other. While some ROs prefer group sessions to be arranged by similar ED profiles (urban vs. rural, EDs with remote areas, new vs. experienced ROs, for example) many ROs prefer meeting with another FLO region to broaden their support network and sources of best practices.

Notes