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Report of the  
**Auditor General  
of Canada**  
to the House of Commons

NOVEMBER

**Chapter 6**  
Elections Canada—  
Administering the Federal Electoral Process



Office of the Auditor General of Canada

*The November 2005 Report of the Auditor General of Canada comprises Matters of Special Importance—2005, Main Points—Chapters 1 to 8, eight chapters, and appendices. The main table of contents is found at the end of this publication.*

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Chapter

# 6

**Elections Canada**

Administering the Federal  
Electoral Process

*All of the audit work in this chapter was conducted in accordance with the standards for assurance engagements set by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. While the Office adopts these standards as the minimum requirement for our audits, we also draw upon the standards and practices of other disciplines.*

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# Elections Canada

## Administering the Federal Electoral Process

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### Main Points

#### What we examined

Under the *Canada Elections Act*, Elections Canada is responsible for delivering federal elections and for supporting eligible voters, through public education and information programs. We examined the activities Elections Canada carries out to prepare for and deliver elections, to improve the electoral process, to educate and inform voters, and to manage its operations.

#### Why it's important

Through federal elections, voters choose members of Parliament to represent Canadians in the House of Commons. Election administration supports the democratic process in Canada by ensuring that all eligible voters can cast their ballots and that elections are fair and transparent. These principles guide Elections Canada's work.

Elections involve citizens at every level of the process. Citizens, election staff, and political parties all contribute to successful elections.

#### What we found

- Elections Canada plans, manages, and administers the federal electoral process well and in accordance with applicable authorities.
- Through good planning and regular updating of its geographic and voter information databases, Elections Canada stays prepared for an election that can be called at any time. It ensures that eligible voters can vote by helping them get their name on the lists of electors; by communicating how, when, and where to vote; and by providing flexible voting opportunities. It also provides considerable support to returning officers and their staff in delivering elections.
- Elections Canada plays a key role in supporting the fairness and transparency of elections by registering political entities and monitoring their financial activities, supporting and monitoring the activities of returning officers and election staff, and ensuring compliance with the *Canada Elections Act*. Further, it delivers a number of public education and information programs aimed at enhancing the understanding of the federal electoral process and increasing the participation rate of targeted groups of electors. We found that Elections Canada works effectively with Parliament and

other stakeholders to identify ways of improving the electoral process.

- Although Elections Canada has the core elements of a good performance measurement and reporting framework, it lacks performance targets and indicators for some of its key activities. As a result, its reports to Parliament are not clear on the extent to which those activities have been successful.
- While Elections Canada has in place some elements of a human resources plan, it uses information that is fragmented. This makes it difficult to anticipate future staffing needs, including the need for succession planning.

**Elections Canada has responded.** In its response to each recommendation throughout the chapter, Elections Canada indicates the action it has taken, is taking, or plans to take to address the recommendation.



## Introduction

### Mandate, funding, and operations

**6.1** Canadians vote to elect members of Parliament to represent them in the House of Commons. All eligible Canadian citizens have the right to vote—a right the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* reaffirmed in 1982. The *Canada Elections Act* sets 18 as the age at which citizens may exercise their right to vote, defines the conditions under which Canadians resident outside Canada can vote, and prohibits the Chief Electoral Officer and Assistant Chief Electoral Officer from voting.

**6.2** The *Dominion Elections Act* of 1920 provided a legal foundation for the electoral system and created the independent Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, now more commonly known as Elections Canada. The legislation has evolved into the *Canada Elections Act*.

**6.3** Parliament established Elections Canada as an independent body to administer elections, referendums, and other important aspects of our electoral system, in accordance with the *Canada Elections Act*, the *Referendum Act*, and the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*.

**6.4** The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada heads Elections Canada and is appointed by a resolution of the House of Commons. The Chief Electoral Officer is an independent agent who reports directly to Parliament. As an Agent of Parliament, the Chief Electoral Officer is independent of the government of the day and serves until retiring at age 65 or resigning. The Governor General can only remove the Chief Electoral Officer from office for cause, following a joint request and majority vote by the House of Commons and the Senate.

**6.5** **Mandate.** Section 16 of the *Canada Elections Act* outlines the Chief Electoral Officer's mandate concerning election readiness and delivery. Exhibit 6.1 summarizes his interpretation of these responsibilities. In recent years, the mandate was expanded by Parliament to include carrying out public education and information programs, as section 18 of the *Canada Elections Act* outlines.

**6.6** The Chief Electoral Officer is responsible for managing Elections Canada's ongoing operations. Elections Canada does not deliver a government program. Elections are a citizens' activity, with citizen involvement at every level. Thus, Elections Canada is not solely responsible for the success of an election. Citizens, election staff, and political parties play roles that are beyond Elections Canada's control.

**6.7 Funding.** An annual appropriation and a statutory authority finance Elections Canada. The annual appropriation provides the salaries of permanent employees and is subject to approval by Parliament as part of the annual main estimates process.

**6.8** All other expenditures the Chief Electoral Officer incurs when delivering his mandate are covered by the statutory authority (Exhibit 6.2). The statutory authority granted to the Chief Electoral Officer is unique. The Chief Electoral Officer has ongoing authorization to draw on the Consolidated Revenue Fund without additional parliamentary approval. The *Canada Elections Act* has granted this authority since creating the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. Legislators likely instituted this provision to ensure that elections would be effective, fair and impartial, and free of government influence. Elections Canada cannot precisely estimate its annual operating budgets, because no one knows in advance when a general election or by-election will be called.

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#### **Exhibit 6.1 Chief Electoral Officer's responsibilities**

The Chief Electoral Officer's responsibilities include

- making sure that all eligible voters have access to the electoral system;
- informing citizens about the electoral system;
- maintaining the National Register of Electors;
- enforcing electoral legislation;
- training election officers;
- producing maps of electoral districts;
- registering political parties, electoral district associations, and third parties that engage in election advertising;
- administering the allowances paid to registered political parties and reimbursements of eligible election expenses to registered political parties and candidates;
- monitoring the election spending of candidates, political parties, and third parties;
- publishing financial information about political parties, electoral district associations, candidates, nomination contestants, leadership contestants, and third parties;
- supporting the independent commissions responsible for adjusting the boundaries of federal electoral districts following each decennial (10-year) census; and
- reporting to Parliament about the administration of elections and referendums.

Source: Elections Canada

**6.9** The Chief Electoral Officer’s statutory authority also covers payments to political parties and candidates for the allowances and reimbursements outlined in the *Canada Elections Act*. Finally, the *Referendum Act* and the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act* also grant the Chief Electoral Officer statutory spending authority.

**6.10** Although not required to do so, the Chief Electoral Officer provides Parliament with an estimate of how much Elections Canada will spend under the statutory authority, as part of the annual main estimates process.

**6.11 Operations.** During 2004–05, Elections Canada employed about 270 permanent employees. The annual appropriation from Parliament finances their salaries. The statutory authority pays the salaries of 117 term employees. As an election approaches, the number of permanent and term employees can grow to more than 600 at headquarters in Ottawa. Elections Canada hires about 170,000 citizens to deliver the election on election day.

**6.12** Elections Canada’s spending varies significantly from year to year, depending on the timing of general elections and by-elections (Exhibit 6.3). Since the introduction of the permanent register of electors in 1997, which replaced door-to-door enumeration for elections, major changes and initiatives designed to improve the

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**Exhibit 6.2 Expenditures covered by statutory spending authority, not by annual appropriation**

Section 553 of the *Canada Elections Act* provides for the following expenditures:

- the Chief Electoral Officer’s salary;
- expenses incurred by the Chief Electoral Officer while exercising his powers and discharging his duties for
  - remuneration paid to any staff hired on a temporary basis,
  - additional remuneration paid to permanent staff for overtime, and
  - any administration expenses;
- expenses incurred in acquiring information to update the permanent register of electors;
- fees, costs, allowances, or expenses for election officers according to rates established in regulation;
- expenses incurred in preparing and printing election material and procuring election supplies; and
- expenses incurred by the Commissioner of Canada Elections while discharging his duties.

Source: *Canada Elections Act*

electoral process have increased spending. These initiatives include improving the quality of the information in the National Register of Electors, accuracy of voter information cards, communication with voters, and the public enquiries system, as well as changes to the *Canada Elections Act* regarding political financing.

**6.13** The direct costs of the 2004 general election amounted to an estimated \$212.4 million compared with \$150.1 million for the 2000 general election. The cost per eligible voter increased from \$7.07 in 2000 to \$9.45 in 2004. Increases in reimbursements to political parties and candidates, inflation, population, fees established by regulation, and the number of electoral districts all contributed to the overall increase in costs.

**6.14** Other key players involved in planning and delivering elections include returning officers, deputy returning officers, poll clerks, the Commissioner of Canada Elections, federal electoral boundaries commissions, and the Broadcasting Arbitrator (Appendix A).

### How elections work

**6.15** Under our Constitution, a general election should be called at least every five years. The Governor General dissolves Parliament, usually at the Prime Minister's request, and the Governor in Council formally calls an election, sets the election date, and instructs the Chief Electoral Officer to issue the election writs—the documents that instruct returning officers in electoral districts to conduct an election on a specified date. By law, an election cannot be held sooner than 36 days after the writs are issued.

**Exhibit 6.3** History of spending (\$ thousands)

Year	1997–98*	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01*	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05*
Appropriation	2,489	2,589	2,832	4,750	11,675	12,528	13,401	17,795
Statutory	196,583	29,397	34,200	198,101	37,881	61,058	96,350	255,845
<b>Total spending</b>	<b>199,072</b>	<b>31,986</b>	<b>37,032</b>	<b>202,851</b>	<b>49,556</b>	<b>73,586</b>	<b>109,751</b>	<b>273,640</b>
Number of By-elections	1	1	5	3	0	9	3	0

\* General election year

Source: Elections Canada's departmental performance reports

**6.16** While most voters cast their ballots on election day, some voters may choose to vote a week early at an advance poll. Voters who register in advance under the Special Voting Rules may mail their ballots directly to Elections Canada or vote in the office of the returning officer in their riding. Except for some ballots cast under the Special Voting Rules, all ballots are counted on election day, regardless of when they are cast.

**6.17** For more information on how the voting process works on election day, how the Special Voting Rules operate, and how ballots are counted, see appendices B, C, and D, or consult Elections Canada's Web site at [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca).

### Focus of the audit

**6.18** Our audit focussed on Elections Canada's activities to maintain readiness for and deliver elections, improve the electoral process, educate and inform voters, and manage its operations.

**6.19** Our objectives were to determine whether Elections Canada

- adequately plans, manages, and administers the federal electoral process;
- manages its activities and resources in accordance with applicable authorities, such as the *Canada Elections Act*, the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*, the *Privacy Act*, the *Financial Administration Act*, and Treasury Board policies and guidelines;
- identifies and acts on ways to improve the federal electoral process and the *Canada Elections Act*; and
- adequately measures performance and reports results achieved.

**6.20** We only examined Elections Canada's activities for general elections, not for by-elections or referendums. We did not examine the activities of returning officers and their staff during the election period or on election day. Therefore, we cannot comment on election delivery. Finally, we did not examine the Broadcasting Arbitrator's activities.

**6.21** For more information about the audit's objectives, scope, approach, and criteria, see **About the Audit** at the end of this chapter.

## Observations and Recommendations

### Preparedness for an election call

#### Elections Canada ensures that it is ready for an election call

**6.22** Under the Canadian parliamentary system, the length of time between federal elections is not fixed, although the House of Commons cannot normally sit for more than five years. Since Elections Canada is required to be ready at all times to deliver an election, planning for readiness is a challenge, given the uncertainty about the timing of elections. We found that the organization's planning systems and practices ensure that it is always ready for an election call.

**6.23** Elections Canada continually monitors parliamentary and political activities and trends to identify factors that might affect the timing of elections. The Chief Electoral Officer establishes a date for readiness, based on possible dates for an election. The selected date becomes the deadline for reaching the highest level of readiness. Elections Canada prepares a detailed plan of more than 800 high-level activities that it must complete by the readiness date. Each activity is mapped on a calendar that shows the start and finish date for the activity and its relationship to other activities. If the deadline passes without an election call, Elections Canada prepares a new plan based on the next established date.

#### Significant effort is devoted to maintaining the information needed to prepare the preliminary lists of electors

**6.24** Under the *Canada Elections Act*, all eligible voters are entitled to have their names included on the lists of electors for the polling division where they reside. There are about 58,000 polling divisions in 308 electoral districts. Inclusion on the list confirms the voters' eligibility to vote; assignment to electoral districts and polling divisions determines the slate of candidates from which they will choose their member of Parliament and where they will cast their ballot. To assign voters to the correct polling division, Elections Canada must know their current residential address, which officials must be able to locate on maps identifying polling divisions.

**6.25** **Maintaining the National Register of Electors.** In 1997, after an amendment to the *Canada Elections Act*, Elections Canada changed its voter registration process from enumeration to a permanent register, the National Register of Electors. The Register was used for the first time in the 2000 general election. Elections Canada devotes significant effort to maintaining and regularly updating the names, residential and mailing

addresses, birth dates, and gender of eligible voters listed in the Register. Since the 2000 election, updating the Register has cost \$19.4 million. There are currently 40 full-time employees devoted to maintaining the Register. Elections Canada officials use the information they gather to create the preliminary lists of electors (paragraph 6.43).

**6.26** Under 36 data-sharing agreements, Elections Canada receives regularly updated information, related to identification of electors, from the Canada Revenue Agency, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Canada Post Corporation, provincial and territorial electoral agencies, provincial and territorial registrars of motor vehicles and vital statistics, and Ontario's Municipal Property Assessment Corporation. It uses that information to maintain the National Register of Electors.

**6.27** Maintaining the quality of information in the Register presents some significant challenges for Elections Canada. First, a voter normally must consent to being added to the Register. Second, about 17 percent of voter information changes each year, including the addresses of voters who move, and the addition of newly eligible voters and removal of deceased voters. Third, the use of multiple data sources from outside Elections Canada creates the risk of receiving different information about the same person or receiving incomplete or incorrect information. A lag between the date a change is made to the source data and the date that Elections Canada receives the new data may cause the problem. Discrepancies may also be caused by the fact that the organization maintaining the source data is collecting different information from the data Elections Canada requires. For example, driver's licence files are a valuable source of information on electors reaching 18 years of age, but they do not provide the consent and the confirmation of citizenship that are required prior to adding new electors from these files.

**6.28** To manage these risks and to prevent errors, Elections Canada uses preventive procedures and conducts manual investigations. Elections Canada has put controls in place to prevent electors being listed under old information or removed in error, or ineligible electors being added to the Register. For example, it has developed matching techniques to identify duplicate records, and it mails out forms to confirm citizenship or to request consent to be added to the Register.

**6.29** Recognizing the importance of the quality of information in the National Register of Electors, Elections Canada has set targets for quality: 92 percent for coverage (the proportion of the estimated total number of eligible voters who are included in the Register) and 77 percent for currency (the percent of all eligible voters at the correct

address). The estimates Elections Canada released in May 2004 on the information in the preliminary lists of electors indicated coverage rates of more than 95 percent and currency rates of more than 81 percent.

**6.30** The proportion of eligible voter information that changes each year and the inherent lag between when information changes and when Elections Canada learns of the changes limits the completeness and accuracy of the information in the National Register of Electors at any given time. As discussed later in this chapter, Elections Canada conducts additional revision activities during an election period, to increase the completeness and accuracy of the lists of electors on election day. The overall efficiency of Elections Canada's data collection and management depends upon the proper mix of activities between elections and during the election period to maximize the completeness and accuracy of the lists of electors on election day.

**6.31 Maintenance of geographic databases.** Elections Canada maintains and regularly updates a comprehensive database of geographical information and digital maps that it can automatically link to voters' residential information. It maintains that geographic information in its National Geographic Database and its Electoral Geography Database. Since the 2000 general election, its geographic activities have required 34 full-time employees and cost \$16.6 million.

**6.32** The National Geographic Database contains streets, street names, and address ranges, as well as other geographic features such as rivers and lakes. Elections Canada collaborated with Statistics Canada to create this database in 1997. Both organizations continue to manage and operate the database jointly to support their own programs. Elections Canada recognizes that maintaining a digital road network is not its primary responsibility. However, when it created the National Geographic Database, no other organization had all the information needed to create the geographic databases that are essential to produce election maps and assign voters to polling divisions. Elections Canada also uses this information to support the activities of the electoral boundaries commissions. The Electoral Geography Database contains the boundaries of the 308 electoral districts and about 58,000 polling divisions. The information in the National Geographic Database and the Electoral Geography Database is combined to produce the various maps and other geographic products required to support electoral events.

**6.33 Determining electoral district boundaries.** Independent of Elections Canada, the federal electoral boundaries commissions determine the boundaries of electoral districts, which are designed to



distribute the population fairly across districts. The last redistribution was completed in 2003, based on the 2001 census.

**6.34** Under the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*, Elections Canada supports the boundaries commissions and pays their operating costs. The last boundary readjustment cost \$10.1 million, including the \$4.1 million Elections Canada incurred internally to support the commissions. Elections Canada's support includes calculating the number of electoral districts, based on Statistics Canada's census information; providing orientation sessions for commissioners; providing administrative and technical assistance; and communicating with the government and the public. We found that Elections Canada's level of support fulfills the Act's requirements.

**6.35 Assignment of voters to polling divisions.** Elections Canada assigns voters to polling divisions using its address geo-coding system that interfaces with the Electoral Geography Database. This system matches the residential addresses in the Register with the mapped addresses in the National Geographic Database. Elections Canada manually geo-codes electors who cannot be matched automatically. To assist in the manual matching, Elections Canada mails letters to voters to confirm their residential addresses and engages returning officers to verify addresses. Through a combination of automated and manual processes, it calculates that for the 2004 general election it geo-coded more than 99 percent of voters on the lists of electors.

#### **Opportunities exist for increased efficiency and cost savings in data collection and management**

**6.36** Elections Canada needs information about eligible voters as well as geographic information, such as a national digital road network, to carry out its mandate. Many other public sector organizations at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels require similar information to carry out their own programs. They each devote resources to develop and operate systems and carry out activities to collect, manage, and share this information.

**6.37** Elections Canada recognizes that there are opportunities, and has undertaken a number of initiatives, to increase efficiency and save money on a government-wide and multi-jurisdictional basis in the collection and management of such information. The rapid evolution of technology could also provide opportunities to increase the cost-effectiveness of data collection and management. However, any such opportunities need to be pursued according to various legislative requirements.

**6.38** In 2003, Elections Canada and Elections British Columbia merged their lists of electors. Elections British Columbia was the first electoral agency in Canada to create a permanent list of electors. This merger was completed after a joint quality audit determined that both Elections Canada and Elections British Columbia would benefit from a merger of their electoral lists and after the necessary legislative changes were made to allow for the merger. Elections Canada is also involved in a project with Elections Ontario and Ontario's Municipal Property Assessment Corporation to develop a single list of electors for the province.

**6.39** Elections Canada is working with other federal organizations to participate in a common national digital road network. It belongs to the Inter-Agency Committee on Geomatics, which consists of federal departments with significant geomatics (computerization applied to geography) infrastructure. A subcommittee is considering the possibility of creating a network that would eventually be available to all federal departments and agencies. Finally, discussions are taking place with the Canada Post Corporation on how to co-operate in maintaining a road network and addresses.

**6.40** In 2002, Elections Canada initiated a study to assess the feasibility of developing and implementing an on-line voter registration system. The results of the study indicated that significant benefits would result from such an initiative. However, Elections Canada determined that security and privacy issues would need to be addressed; legislation would need to be amended; and existing systems would need to be updated, requiring significant human and financial resources. Nevertheless, Elections Canada indicated that on-line voter registration is still a priority.

**6.41 Recommendation.** Elections Canada, in collaboration with other public sector organizations, should pursue its efforts and explore additional ways to rationalize and improve the overall efficiency of data collection and management of information on Canadians and Canadian geography.

**Elections Canada's response.** Elections Canada will continue to be a trailblazer and to provide leadership to rationalize and improve efficiency while providing the best possible service to Canadian electors.

We will build on the 36 existing agreements with various federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal agencies to support voter registration. To date, data-sharing partnerships with electoral agencies have resulted in significant savings.

The Electoral Technology Accord signed by all provincial and territorial chief electoral officers builds upon data-sharing partnerships and demonstrates their commitment to increased co-operation to achieve cost savings and efficiencies through common processes and services, shared data, and expertise.

We will continue to maintain the National Geographic Database with Statistics Canada, as well as partner with Statistics Canada and other federal organizations to develop a common national road network through the Inter-Agency Committee on Geomatics, which is co-chaired by Natural Resources Canada and the Department of National Defence. Finally, we will pursue additional partnerships in this area with the Canada Post Corporation.

In June of this year, Elections Canada launched a strategic review of voter registration, in collaboration with all stakeholders, to continue improving list quality and voter registration services. New partnership opportunities are expected to arise from this project.

The Chief Electoral Officer's recent report to Parliament on proposed changes to the *Canada Elections Act* includes recommendations specifically designed to further facilitate register and geography partnerships, such as recommendation 2.20, Sharing Elector Data with Provincial Electoral Authorities for Updating Purposes, and recommendation 2.21, Sharing Neutral Address and Geographic Information.

## Delivering fair and transparent elections

### Elections Canada ensures access to the electoral system for all eligible voters

**6.42** One of the Chief Electoral Officer's priorities is to ensure that all eligible voters can access the electoral system. Elections Canada is responsible for getting new voters on the National Register of Electors and revising the residence information of those already on the Register. It is also responsible for communicating with voters about how, when, and where to exercise their right to vote, particularly those voters who might have trouble casting their ballots. Finally, Elections Canada must offer voters alternative ways to cast their ballots. These alternatives must respect the personal circumstances of voters who can't get to a polling station, such as hospital residents, armed forces personnel, or inmates. Our review of Elections Canada's activities revealed that it provides significant support to voters to ensure access to the electoral system for all.

**6.43 Preparing and updating the preliminary lists of electors.**

When the Chief Electoral Officer issues the election writs, Elections Canada uses the National Register of Electors to create preliminary lists of electors for each electoral district. Returning officers use these lists during the election period to revise (update, correct, add, and delete) eligible voter information. Candidates also use these lists in their campaigns. Finally, Elections Canada uses the lists to calculate election expense limits for political parties and candidates.

**6.44** For the 2004 general election, Elections Canada spent \$50 million on revision activities to update the information on the preliminary lists of electors. This amount included \$14.9 million for voter information cards that serve both revision and communication purposes (paragraph 6.51), and \$10 million for computer equipment including servers in offices of returning officers. It made about 3.3 million revisions to the lists.

**6.45** Under the *Canada Elections Act*, voter information cards must be mailed to voters within 24 days of the election being called. The purpose of the card is to inform voters that they are registered on the preliminary lists of electors and provide information on how, when, and where to vote. One week later, a reminder card is sent to all households to advise voters on how to follow up if they have not received a voter information card. Elections Canada also conducts targeted revision activities (door-to-door registration). As a final measure, the *Canada Elections Act* allows for registration at advance polls and on election day.

**6.46** Overall, we found that Elections Canada supported voters well by communicating information on registration and on how they could revise their personal information on the preliminary lists of electors. In our view, the measures in place facilitated access to the electoral process.

**6.47** Elections Canada spent almost \$5 million on door-to-door registration in 2004. The main purpose of these activities is to reach voters not registered at their current address. Therefore, the activities are concentrated in selected neighbourhoods where there is a higher probability that voters are not registered at their current address, such as new subdivisions, student residences, or areas with highly mobile residents. In 2004 officials visited 780,000 more addresses, completed 74,000 more revision forms, and left 140,000 more forms for residents who weren't at home than in 2000 (Exhibit 6.4). However, Elections Canada does not know how many voters later completed and returned these forms. Nevertheless, these results indicate that the completeness and accuracy of the National Register of Electors is improving

significantly. Given the cost of targeted revision, it would be important for Elections Canada, in determining the extent of use in the future, to assess the cost-effectiveness of this method relative to other types of revision activities.

**6.48** Once preliminary lists of electors have been produced, the returning officers are responsible for revisions to the lists during the election period. A computer application called REVISE captures revisions to the lists of electors during the election period. REVISE was developed prior to the 2000 general election at a cost of \$4.6 million, and it was subsequently upgraded in 2001 and 2003, at a cost of \$6.5 million. Elections Canada maintains REVISE outside the National Register of Electors. After the election, Elections Canada staff upload revisions to the Register.

**6.49** We noted that using two separate systems has created a number of problems. Because of some incompatibilities between the two systems, staff couldn't upload almost 250,000 records. Elections Canada staff needed to review most of these records before updating the Register. Elections Canada informed us that staff completed their review by the end of April 2005, 10 months after the election.

**6.50** In our view, Elections Canada could benefit from assessing other options to the use of REVISE.

**6.51 Communication with voters.** Elections Canada devotes significant efforts to communicating with voters. It developed a communication approach where various types of communication are used to achieve different purposes. For the 2004 general election, it spent \$24.5 million on such activities, not including the cost of voter information cards (\$14.9 million), which it classifies as a cost of revising the preliminary lists of electors.

**Exhibit 6.4 Targeted revision statistics**

Targeted revision	2004	2004 (percentage)	2000	2000 (percentage)	Variance
Addresses where revisions were required—forms completed	266,000	21%	192,000	37%	74,000
Addresses where there was no answer—forms left	289,000	22%	149,000	29%	140,000
Addresses confirmed	740,000	57%	174,000	34%	566,000
<b>Total addresses visited</b>	<b>1,295,000</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>515,000</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>780,000</b>

Source: Elections Canada—Reports filed by returning officers (not audited)

**6.52** Voter information cards provide information on how, when, and where to vote. Print and media advertising campaigns, in multiple languages, account for about half of the total communication expenses. They provide useful information to electors, such as advance polling dates, and encourage them to exercise their right to vote. Other key communication tools include Elections Canada's Web site, a voter information service (combined toll-free voice response system and Web service) that operates around the clock during the election period, community relations officers that are responsible for reaching voters at the community level, and election information guides in many languages.

**6.53** Elections Canada has developed a separate plan for each type of communication, based on its experience and research in voter behaviour and communication methods. A steering committee co-ordinates and recommends all communications activities for approval. Elections Canada has also developed a proposed framework for its strategic communications plan. However, this document needs to be updated and finalized in order to provide an overall framework to guide its various communications activities. Elections Canada has also developed a number of performance indicators and collects information through various means, such as post-election surveys and analysis of statistics, to evaluate the effectiveness of its communications initiatives. However, there are very few targets against which it can measure their success.

**6.54** We noted that there is an inherent degree of overlap among the various types of communications used during an election period. This overlap is often part of planned communication strategies. However, given the magnitude and costs of its communication activities, Elections Canada could benefit from a comprehensive and integrated assessment of the cost-effectiveness of its communications activities. This could help it determine the relative impact of its various types of communication and decide whether to try a different approach, as well as provide useful information in planning for the next general election.

**6.55 Providing voters with flexibility.** Elections Canada offers voters a variety of voting opportunities and has safeguards built-in to the voting process. Voters can vote on election day at a regular poll or a mobile poll, during three days of advance polls, or by special ballot through the mail. Exhibit 6.5 provides voting statistics by voting method for the 2004 general election.

**6.56** Elections Canada has control processes in place to ensure that offering this flexibility, as well as allowing voters to register on election

day, does not compromise the integrity of the electoral process. The control processes provide that the names of voters who register for a special ballot or vote at advance polls are crossed off the lists of electors on election day. Further, once the election is over, Elections Canada conducts post-election analysis to ensure that electors did not vote more than once.

**Exhibit 6.5** Voting statistics by method of voting — 2004 general election

Method of voting	Valid ballots cast	Percentage of total valid ballots cast
Election day	12,070,222	89%
Advance polls	1,248,469	9%
Special ballot	246,011	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,564,702</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Elections Canada

**6.57 Recommendation.** Elections Canada should

- assess the cost-effectiveness of its targeted revision activities,
- consider other options to REVISE, and
- evaluate the effectiveness of its communication strategy.

**Elections Canada's response.** The Chief Electoral Officer's recent report to Parliament recommends that revising agents should no longer have to work in pairs while performing targeted revision, a measure that would reduce by half revising agents' fees, related training costs, and travel allowances. Based on the 2004 general election, this would amount to a reduction of some \$2.4 million in the cost of targeted revision. The Chief Electoral Officer has also recommended that there be increased flexibility regarding the registration of electors who are absent when a revising agent visits their residence. That is, the elector answering the door would be able to register other eligible electors residing there, without having to provide proof of identification for them. This would increase registration rates at no additional cost.

Elections Canada has already initiated a project to conduct a complete review of its voter registration processes. Data management and systems for lists of electors will also be examined in light of current technological advances.

The advertising campaign for the 2004 general election was developed on the basis of the assessment of the campaign used for the 2000 election and the feedback it generated from parliamentarians and



others, as well as the evolving strategies for outreach to target groups. As no negative feedback was received on the 2004 campaign, the Chief Electoral Officer decided that Elections Canada would use the same communications program for the next general election. This decision enabled the agency to be ready with a tested program generating significant savings. In accordance with this recommendation, Elections Canada will undertake a review of the campaign after the next general election.

### **Elections Canada assists and provides extensive support to returning officers**

**6.58 Assisting returning officers in maintaining their readiness for an election call.** Returning officers prepare for and conduct elections in their electoral district and must be ready to assume their responsibilities at any time. When the position of a returning officer becomes vacant, the Governor in Council appoints a replacement.

**6.59** Elections Canada does a good job helping returning officers to stay ready for an election. Once Elections Canada is notified that the Governor in Council has appointed a returning officer, the organization contacts the officer and provides orientation materials. Returning officers may also draw on a comprehensive training program, a large number of operations manuals, and useful planning tools to ensure that they are ready for an election.

**6.60** The *Canada Elections Act* sets a limit of 60 days to fill vacancies through appointments. We found that appointments are not always made within the prescribed time limit.

**6.61** Elections Canada raised concerns about the ability of some returning officers to perform their duties. Based on competency tests from 2002 and 2003 and performance assessments prepared after the 2000 general election, Elections Canada determined that some returning officers were not fully qualified for their positions. We interviewed a number of stakeholders who also raised this point.

### **6.62 Supporting returning officers in delivering elections.**

Elections Canada provides extensive support to returning officers and their election staff. The organization maintains ongoing communication with returning officers and has a help line dedicated to returning officers and their staff, with 120 advisors on call to help resolve problems. For the 2004 general election, Elections Canada hired 24 field liaison officers to work directly with returning officers.

**6.63** Elections Canada's management team monitors the status of preparations at the electoral district level on a daily basis. Its Event



Management Framework is centred around daily Executive Committee meetings. A computerized event management system provides daily exception reports that identify returning officers who have not met established deadlines, targets, or statutory obligations for event readiness. The information is used to help those returning officers.

**6.64** After an election, Elections Canada prepares performance assessments to help returning officers do their jobs better. Elections Canada also solicits feedback from returning officers.

**6.65** To ensure that returning officers and election staff act fairly and impartially, Elections Canada follows up on concerns that its daily monitoring identifies. Staff also investigate all complaints from voters, candidates, and other stakeholders about the behaviour of election officials.

#### **Controls are in place to monitor compliance with the *Canada Elections Act***

**6.66** The *Canada Elections Act* requires that political entities register with Elections Canada to access benefits the Act provides. With the introduction of Bill C-24, which became effective 1 January 2004, political entities now include political parties, candidates, electoral district associations, and nomination and leadership contestants. All third parties incurring election advertising expenses of \$500 or more must also register.

**6.67** The *Canada Elections Act* contains a number of provisions aimed at ensuring the fairness and transparency of elections. Monitoring compliance with and enforcing the Act are essential to maintaining public trust in the electoral process.

**6.68** For example, the Act limits contributions and election expenses and establishes disclosure requirements. It also precludes voters from voting twice, bars election officers from committing partisan acts, and prohibits the use of personal information from the National Register of Electors and advertising on election day.

**6.69** Under the *Canada Elections Act*, registered political parties and candidates that meet eligibility requirements are entitled to receive partial reimbursement of their election expenses. They can also issue tax receipts for contributions. Political parties also benefit from quarterly allowances that are based on the number of votes they received in the last general election. For 2004, political parties received about \$22 million in allowances. Political parties and candidates will be reimbursed a total of about \$57 million—\$31 million to political parties and \$26 million to candidates. Political

entities (there are minimum thresholds for nomination contestants and third parties) must submit a financial return to Elections Canada within a prescribed time period to demonstrate compliance with the Act.

**6.70** A number of control mechanisms are in place to ensure compliance with the Act, including

- the monitoring of returning officers' activities;
- post-election analysis on duplicate voting;
- investigation of complaints from various stakeholders and the public;
- the requirement that most financial returns be accompanied by an auditor's report on whether they fairly present the information contained in the records on which the returns are based;
- Elections Canada's audit and review of the returns;
- the requirement for candidates and official agents to sign declarations; and
- public disclosure, on Elections Canada's Web site, of all returns, allowing political entities, other stakeholders, and the public to scrutinize each other's returns.

These controls are aimed at providing reasonable assurance that political entities are complying with the Act. However, it is important to note that controls can never provide absolute assurance that instances of fraud or error have not occurred.

**6.71** The *Canada Elections Act* addresses a number of offences associated with deliberate attempts to circumvent contribution limits and disclosure rules, or to make a false declaration. The Commissioner of Canada Elections may also decide to initiate investigations of potential violations of the Act. Offenders may be prosecuted.

**6.72 Review of financial returns.** Elections Canada is responsible for ensuring that financial returns comply with the various provisions of the Act and for reviewing and processing reimbursements for eligible election expenses and auditors' subsidies, which are based on the amount of eligible election expenses. Reimbursements to candidates are made in a two-step process. In July 2004, initial reimbursements, totalling about \$10 million, were made to all eligible candidates—those who received at least 10 percent of the valid votes in their riding. Final reimbursements, which are based on information contained in the candidates returns, are processed once the review of the

candidates' returns have been completed. Following the 2004 general election, over 400 candidate returns were not received by the filing deadline of 28 October 2004 and were granted extensions.

**6.73** The *Canada Elections Act* requires political parties and candidates to submit an auditor's report with their returns and provides for subsidies to candidate's auditors to cover a portion of the audit cost; such subsidies will amount to \$1.3 million for the 2004 general election. The Act also requires candidates to submit supporting documentation with their returns; political parties do not have to do so. Consequently, Elections Canada must place reliance on auditors' reports for returns of political parties.

**6.74** According to section 465 of the *Canada Elections Act*, the Chief Electoral Officer must be satisfied that all candidates and their official agents have complied with specific sections of the Act. Consequently, all returns filed by candidates are reviewed to verify, to the extent possible, that they comply with the requirements of the Act. According to Elections Canada, the review of the supporting documentation provided by candidates allows accurate payments for reimbursements and audit subsidies and identifies potential and actual non-compliance situations that would not have been discovered by the candidate's auditor. This enables Elections Canada to provide information to the official agent of the candidate on measures that could be taken to correct the non-compliance situation, where possible, such as amending the return to correct an error or omission, or returning ineligible contributions.

**6.75** We examined the review process carried out by Elections Canada for 35 candidates' returns and 5 political parties' returns. We found that Elections Canada staff followed the process consistently in every case.

**6.76** The review of financial returns for candidates requires considerable effort. For the 2004 general election, Elections Canada received 1,686 returns from candidates, of which 837 were eligible for reimbursement. By 31 March 2005, five months after the filing deadline, Elections Canada had reviewed 256 of these returns. The 581 returns awaiting review represented about \$15 million in unpaid reimbursements. Of the 849 candidate returns that were ineligible for reimbursement, 205 had been reviewed. Finally, 267 of the 417 returns from third parties and people running for nomination, as a candidate or leader of a political party, had been reviewed. However, we noted that the review of the 12 returns from political parties had been completed quickly.

**6.77 Enforcing the Act.** The Commissioner of Canada Elections is responsible for ensuring that the *Canada Elections Act* is complied with and enforced.

**6.78** Elections Canada carries out a number of activities to identify potential non-compliance and directs its concerns to the Commissioner of Canada Elections. The Commissioner also receives correspondence and complaints directly and may decide to initiate an investigation.

**6.79** During an election period, the Commissioner may apply for a court injunction in cases where a suspected breach may compromise the fairness of the election. Other options for enforcement include compliance agreements and prosecution.

**6.80** To investigate suspected violations, the Commissioner has developed a comprehensive investigation process that complies with the Act and uses trained and experienced investigators to carry out the investigations. We reviewed the investigation process for 41 investigations and found that the Commissioner's office followed it consistently.

### Delivering public education programs

**6.81** The *Canada Elections Act* gives the Chief Electoral Officer a mandate to deliver public education and information programs. These programs enhance understanding of the federal electoral process and help eligible voters exercise their right to vote, particularly those for whom voting may be difficult. While complementary to the various means of election communication (informing voters on how, when, and where to vote, and how to revise their information on the lists of electors), the public education programs are broader in scope and are intended to produce mid-and long-term impacts.

#### **Elections Canada has targeted groups to reach to increase voter participation**

**6.82** Based on its post-election evaluation, research, analysis, and consultations, Elections Canada has identified groups of voters it wants to reach with public education and information programs. They include youth, Aboriginals, ethno-cultural groups, and people with special needs.

**6.83** Elections Canada's action plans list and describe the various initiatives it will undertake to meet specific objectives, key milestones, and its budget. Although Elections Canada conducts surveys and discussion groups to assess the performance of various initiatives once they are completed, the action plans do not include targets that would allow the organization to measure its performance against expectations and determine the level of success of its initiatives.

**6.84** In February 2004, the House of Commons reaffirmed the importance of this aspect of Elections Canada’s mandate when it passed the following resolution:

That the House direct the Chief Electoral Officer and Elections Canada to expand its initiatives to promote the participation of young Canadians in the electoral process, and that these initiatives include making available educational materials to schools and other organizations, and supporting parallel voting opportunities for prospective electors during federal elections, including making available polling materials and the publication of results of such parallel voting, and that Elections Canada work creatively with such groups as Kids Voting Canada, Scouts Canada, Guides Canada, teachers and others, and provide regular reports on these matters to the House of Commons through the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs.

**6.85** For the 2004 general election, Elections Canada undertook a number of initiatives to expand its activities aimed at increasing the participation of young Canadians in the electoral process. These included, for example, Student Vote 2004, a program that provided students under 18 years of age the opportunity to experience the federal electoral process through a parallel election in their schools. Elections Canada also participated with an outside partner in developing a teacher’s guide for Youth Vote 2004, an education and media program that offered high schools students the opportunity to participate in weekly on-line voting on various issues throughout the 2004 election period. Elections Canada intends to report on these initiatives in its 2004–05 Performance Report to Parliament.

## Performance measurement and reporting

**6.86** Clear measurement and reporting of performance are essential to ensure accountability to parliamentarians and Canadians. Performance information is also essential if Elections Canada is going to make sound decisions about how to manage itself to produce expected results.

### The core elements of a good performance measurement framework are in place

**6.87** Elections Canada has developed a number of mechanisms and tools to measure the performance of its activities. It collects and analyzes performance information through various means. Overall, we found that the core elements of a good performance measurement framework are in place.

**6.88** Elections Canada conducts extensive evaluations after each general election. The results of these evaluations identify areas for

improvements in service delivery and election management. The results are also used to make suggestions for improving the federal electoral process and the *Canada Elections Act*. Elections Canada also undertook a number of assessments of its programs and projects, including the evaluation of some new initiatives since the 2000 general election, such as the introduction of field liaison officers and outreach activities targeted at youth.

**6.89** Elections Canada has set performance expectation targets and developed performance indicators to monitor and assess the performance of its election delivery. Its Event Management System contains extensive information on the progress of key activities that need to be carried out to deliver an election, both in the 308 electoral districts and at national headquarters. The information is used after the election to assess overall performance in delivering an election and to identify areas for improvement.

**6.90** Elections Canada has established performance targets and quantitative and qualitative performance indicators for some of its ongoing activities, including targets for the coverage and accuracy of the National Register of Electors, the reach of its advertising campaign, and participation in its youth outreach programs. In our view, there are still opportunities for improvement, particularly in communication and public education programs, and we encourage Elections Canada to continue its efforts in this area.

**6.91 Recommendation.** Elections Canada should enhance the quality of its performance measures and ensure that performance targets and indicators are in place for all of its key activities.

**Elections Canada's response.** Elections Canada will continue to build on its experience and expertise in establishing comprehensive performance indicators for election readiness and delivery activities, to determine and refine targets and indicators for its ongoing programs, particularly its advertising campaign and its voter education and outreach programs for youth, Aboriginal communities, ethnocultural groups, and people with disabilities.

#### **Reporting on future strategic direction needs to be enhanced**

**6.92** Elections Canada provides annual reports to parliamentarians on its plans, priorities, and performance. The Chief Electoral Officer is required by legislation to submit additional reports to Parliament on the administration of a general election and on recommendations for amendments to the *Canada Elections Act*.

**6.93** These documents contain extensive information on the activities of Elections Canada and on the federal electoral process. However, they do not clearly show how activities and proposals are linked to long-term strategic goals and objectives. In our view, the information in all these documents needs to be better integrated.

**6.94** The annual reports on plans and priorities identify Elections Canada's purpose, external risks and challenges, strategic outcomes, and specific priorities. However, in our view, Elections Canada needs to better communicate its future direction with more strategic information on the resources that it will need and how it will measure its success. We also noted that Elections Canada's most recent strategic plan covers the period ending in 2001–02. Updating this plan is essential to set and communicate its future direction.

**6.95** Elections Canada informs Parliament about its performance through its annual performance report. The Chief Electoral Officer also produces a post-election report to provide Parliament with information on election performance and on Elections Canada's activities since the previous report.

**6.96** We reviewed the performance reports for the last four years and the Chief Electoral Officer's report on the 2004 general election. The information was clearly presented and the performance targets reported were clear and concrete. However, a number of achievements were expressed in terms of how many activities or initiatives were completed, rather than the extent to which the initiatives were successful. As already noted, establishing performance targets for all key activities would help to assess the progress made in achieving intended objectives.

**6.97** We also reviewed the Chief Electoral Officer's report following the 2004 general election on suggestions for change to the electoral legislation. Elections Canada had thoroughly analyzed the weaknesses in the legislation.

**6.98 Recommendation.** Elections Canada should enhance its reporting to Parliament on its future strategic direction and on the progress made in achieving its objectives.

**Elections Canada's response.** Elections Canada has already undertaken to update its strategic plan. In future appearances before Parliament, the Chief Electoral Officer will continue to draw linkages between the strategic direction of the agency, recommendations to amend electoral legislation to improve the electoral process, and the actual performance of the organization between and during elections.



## Financial and human resources management

### Financial resources are managed in accordance with relevant authorities

**6.99** In our review of Elections Canada's control over procurement and expenditures, we noted no significant weaknesses in controls. The transactions we reviewed complied with relevant Treasury Board policies and the *Financial Administration Act*.

**6.100** In 2003, Elections Canada assessed its financial management control framework and found that the framework contributes to ensuring compliance with the relevant authorities. It has developed an action plan to address some of the recommendations from the assessment. We found that some of the recommendations have been implemented and others are under way.

**6.101** Internal audit is a key element of corporate governance. It assures senior managers that key financial, administrative, and operational activities are efficient and effective. Internal auditors may also suggest improvements. We noted that Elections Canada has an internal audit function and an audit committee. The audit committee is composed of the Chief Electoral Officer, the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, the Senior Director—Electoral Financing, Audit and Reporting, one member of the Executive Committee (on a rotational basis), and the Director—Political Financing and Audit. An emerging best practice in the public sector is to include one or more members who are not officers or employees of the organization—something that Elections Canada may want to consider.

**6.102** We noted that internal audit has conducted or commissioned a number of internal audit projects in recent years. It has also conducted a risk-assessment for the purpose of preparing a new internal audit plan, and proposed revisions to Elections Canada's internal audit policy. Management informed us that the composition of the audit committee will be re-assessed, and that the internal audit plan and the internal audit policy will be finalized following the completion of a government-wide review of internal audit by the Treasury Board Secretariat.

### Human resources planning needs to be formalized

**6.103** We reviewed Elections Canada's systems and practices for planning and managing its human resources, including its human resources policies, its Human Resources Information System (HRIS), and its analysis and use of the information provided by the system.



**6.104** Overall, Elections Canada has good practices in place for managing its human resources. However, it needs to formalize its planning for human resources.

**6.105** Elections Canada tracks very little information on its performance in managing its human resources. A human resources information system that is more robust and more closely suited to the needs of Elections Canada would help produce relevant and timely information for decision-making purposes. By establishing key indicators for managing human resources and tracking information on performance, Elections Canada would be in a better position to assess trends and determine important human resources issues.

**6.106** Term employees form a key component of Elections Canada staff. Exhibit 6.6 summarizes the number of permanent (indeterminate) and term employees over the last several years.

**6.107** As mentioned in the Introduction, salaries of permanent employees are funded through an annual parliamentary appropriation, and salaries of term employees are funded through the statutory authority. To increase its complement of permanent employees, Elections Canada requires an increase in its annual appropriation level. This happened twice in the last several years. In May 2000, it obtained approval for a permanent increase of \$10.1 million in its parliamentary appropriation to convert 156 term positions to permanent positions. Elections Canada indicated at the time that it would continue to need term employees for specific, temporary activities related to elections. In 2001–02, this represented about 100 term employees. In February 2004, Elections Canada obtained approval for an additional increase of \$8.5 million in permanent funding to convert 85 term employees to permanent positions and to create 35 new positions. These 35 positions were related to implementing the financial provisions of Bill C-24 and the 85 converted positions were to meet Elections Canada’s commitments to Parliament to improve its services to the public, parliamentarians, partners, and other stakeholders.

**Exhibit 6.6** Permanent (indeterminate) and term employees at Elections Canada

	1997–98*	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01*	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05*
Permanent	52	49	49	78	191	194	200	269
Term	227	177	179	287	100	146	152	117
<b>Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>386</b>

\* General election year

Source: Elections Canada

**6.108** In our view, Elections Canada needs to formalize its planning for human resources. Although some elements of a human resources plan are in place, the information is fragmented. In particular, the organization needs to ensure that the tenure of positions is well defined before it initiates staffing action.

**6.109** Finally, we noted that, as in other public service organizations, an aging population is a current issue in Elections Canada. Succession planning is needed to ensure that people with the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience are available when needed and that corporate knowledge is not lost when employees leave the organization.

**6.110 Recommendation.** Elections Canada should

- develop and implement a human resources plan and a succession plan that are linked to its long-term strategic direction and objectives, and
- establish key performance indicators and obtain information on its performance for the management of human resources.

**Elections Canada's response.** Elections Canada's human resources plan will be formalized in the context of the *Public Service Modernization Act*, while continuing to meet the requirements of the *Public Service Employment Act* and the *Canada Elections Act*. This plan will be linked to the agency's strategic plan and integrated with the annual business planning cycle.

Elections Canada will also review its key performance indicators in the area of human resources management and establish additional indicators in accordance with the needs of the agency.

## Conclusion

**6.111** Elections Canada plans, manages, and administers the federal electoral process well, according to applicable authorities. It has good planning systems and practices in place to ensure that it will be ready to deliver an election when one is called. It regularly updates its information on geography and eligible voters, and it conducts additional activities during the election period to obtain the information it needs to prepare the lists of electors.

**6.112** Elections Canada provides good assistance and support to returning officers to maintain their readiness for an election call and to deliver elections. It ensures access to the electoral process for all

eligible voters by helping them revise their personal information on the lists of electors; communicating important information on how, when, and where to vote; and providing flexible opportunities to vote. It also delivers a number of public education and information programs aimed at enhancing the understanding of the electoral process and reaching out to groups of electors whose participation rate has been historically lower than the national average.

**6.113** Elections Canada plays a key role in supporting the fairness and transparency of the electoral process by registering political entities and monitoring their financial activities, monitoring the activities of returning officers and election staff, and ensuring compliance with the *Canada Election Act*. It also conducts extensive post-event assessments and works with Parliament and other stakeholders to improve the electoral process.

**6.114** Our audit has highlighted opportunities to improve efficiency in certain aspects of Elections Canada's activities. Elections Canada needs to pursue its current efforts and explore additional ways to improve the efficiency of the collection and management of information on geography and eligible voters, on a government-wide and multi-jurisdiction basis.

**6.115** Elections Canada has set some performance expectation targets and developed some performance indicators to assess the performance of its key activities. It also provides extensive information to Parliament on its activities and on the federal electoral process. It is important that the organization continue its efforts to improve the quality of its performance measures, particularly for communication and public education programs. It also needs to enhance its reporting to Parliament on its strategic direction and on the progress made in achieving its objectives.

**6.116** Finally, we noted no significant weaknesses in controls for procurement and expenditures. Some improvements in its human resources planning practices and information systems will benefit Election Canada's current operations and help the organization plan more effectively for the future.

## About the Audit

### Objectives

The objectives of the audit were to determine whether Elections Canada

- adequately plans, manages, and administers the federal electoral process;
- manages its activities and resources in accordance with the *Canada Elections Act*, the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*, the *Privacy Act*, the *Financial Administration Act*, and other relevant Treasury Board policies and guidelines;
- identifies areas for improvement in the federal electoral process and the *Canada Elections Act* and takes action to address them; and
- adequately measures performance and reports results.

### Scope and approach

We examined Elections Canada's activities to prepare for and deliver elections and to improve the electoral process. We also examined its public education and information programs and the way Elections Canada is managed.

We carried out extensive interviews with Elections Canada's staff and a variety of stakeholders. We reviewed legislation, program documents, scope and briefing notes, minutes of executive and advisory committee meetings, financial information, studies and evaluations, public communications, review files, and investigation files. We also met staff who deliver provincial elections in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec.

Our audit examined Elections Canada's activities for general elections. It did not include by-elections or referendums. Further, we did not examine the actual delivery of elections—that is, we did not audit the activities of returning officers and their staff during the election period or on election day. Therefore, we cannot comment on election delivery. Finally, we did not examine the activities of the Broadcasting Arbitrator.

### Criteria

We expected that Elections Canada would have a plan to manage and administer the federal electoral process that

- respects relevant authorities, such as the *Canada Elections Act*, the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*, and the *Privacy Act*;
- ensures constant election readiness;
- considers business risks, including technological risks, to ensure the successful delivery of an election;
- ensures all eligible voters have access to the system;
- ensures the fairness and transparency of the electoral process; and
- respects principles of economy and efficiency.

We also expected that Elections Canada would

- establish and maintain adequate management controls over financial and human resources and monitor their effectiveness;
- respect relevant authorities, such as the *Financial Administration Act* and other Treasury Board policies and guidelines;
- work with Parliament and other stakeholders to improve the federal electoral process and monitor progress; and
- maintain clear and concrete strategic outcomes and performance expectations, report credible and balanced performance results against these expectations, and use its performance information to improve the administration of the federal electoral process and to promote good accountability to Parliament.

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## Appendix A Other key players in planning and delivering an election

**Returning officers.** One returning officer is assigned to each of the 308 electoral districts (or ridings) in Canada. The political party in power nominates returning officers, and the Governor in Council appoints them. Returning officers, with the help of an assistant returning officer, prepare and conduct the election in their electoral districts, under the direction and supervision of the Chief Electoral Officer. The Governor in Council may only remove returning officers for just cause. Elections Canada pays returning officers a fixed rate, based on regulation, when they are working on the election. Between elections, they receive a stipend. A returning officer's official duties begin when the writs are issued, and those duties must be completed within 36 days. On average, a returning officer manages about 55 people in the returning office, hires and trains between 500 and 600 staff for election day, and manages a budget of about \$350,000. Returning officers are responsible for conducting the election in their electoral districts in a way that ensures the fairness and integrity of the election. Elections Canada directs, supervises, and guides returning officers, and monitors the way they prepare for and conduct elections.

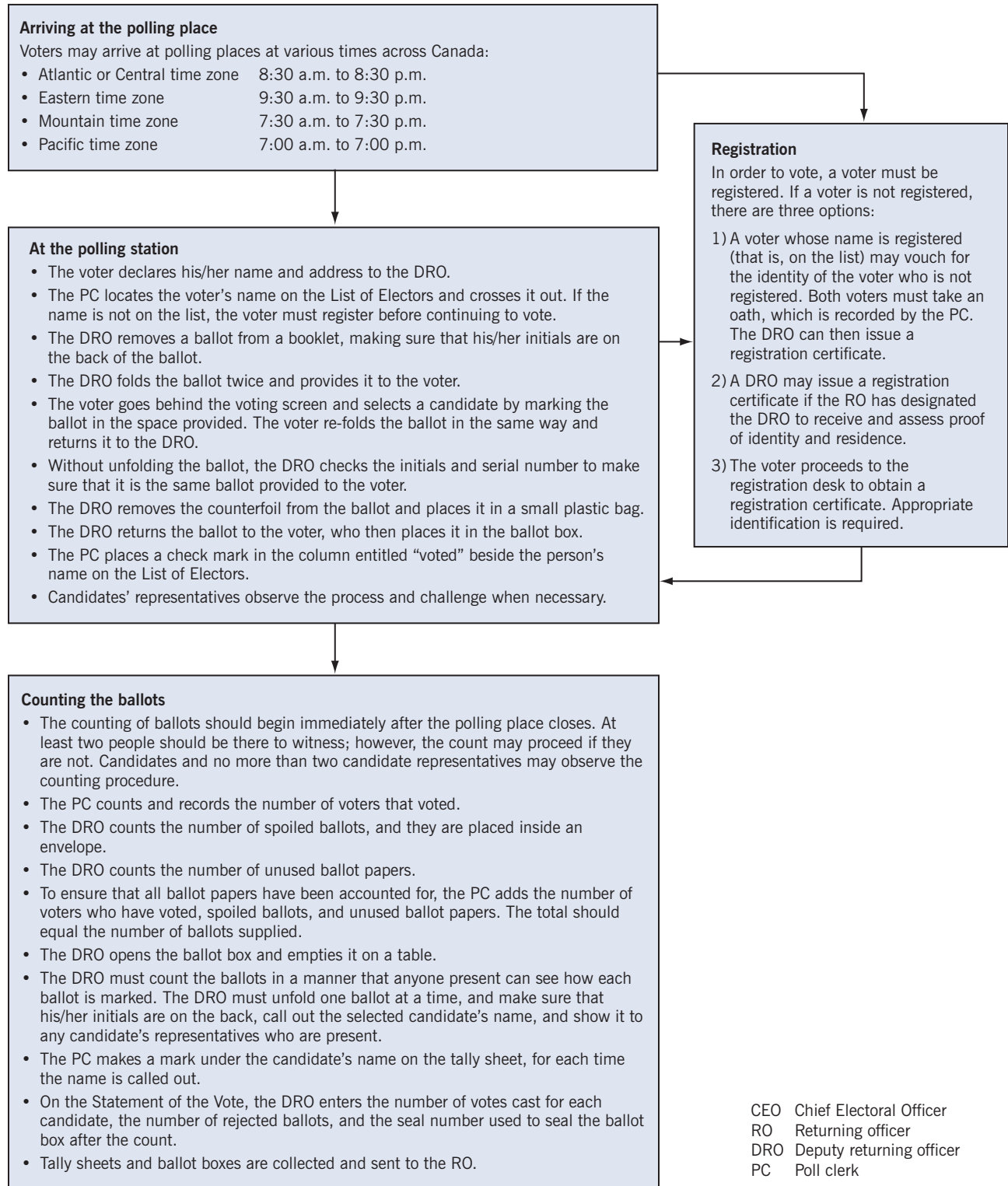
**Deputy returning officers and poll clerks.** There are about 58,000 polling divisions in the 308 electoral districts. Each division has one deputy returning officer responsible for all ballot-related activities, such as giving voters their ballots, and one poll clerk responsible for activities related to the polling division's List of Electors, such as finding the voter's name on the list. Elections Canada pays deputy returning officers and poll clerks to work on election day and at advance polls.

**Commissioner of Canada Elections.** The Chief Electoral Officer appoints the Commissioner of Canada Elections to enforce the *Canada Elections Act* and the *Referendum Act*. The Commissioner investigates suspected non-compliance and may decide to prosecute violators. Prosecutions take place through Canada's normal court process, without the Attorney General's involvement, thus maintaining the non-partisan electoral process.

**Federal electoral boundaries commissions.** The *Constitution Act, 1867* and the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act* call for representation in the House of Commons to be adjusted after each decennial (10-year) census, to reflect changes and movements in Canada's population. The Governor in Council creates a federal electoral boundaries commission in each province to consider and report on changes to the electoral district boundaries. The most recent adjustment was completed in 2003 and became effective in 2004, for the 2004 general election. Elections Canada provides support services to the boundaries commissions except in the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut, each of which constitutes only one electoral district and thus requires no boundaries commissions.

**Broadcasting Arbitrator.** The Chief Electoral Officer appoints a Broadcasting Arbitrator for the next election event, six months after the previous election. The Broadcasting Arbitrator allocates paid and free broadcasting time for political parties during a general election, according to a formula set out in the Act. The Broadcasting Arbitrator also arbitrates disputes between political parties and broadcasters during a general election. The scope of this audit did not include the activities of the Broadcasting Arbitrator.

## Appendix B Voting process on election day



## Appendix C Special Voting Rules

The Special Voting Rules, part 11 of the *Canada Elections Act*, provide for Canadians to cast a ballot by mail from virtually anywhere in the world. The Special Voting Rules apply to five categories of voters:

- Canadian Forces voters;
- Incarcerated voters;
- Canadian citizens temporarily residing outside Canada for fewer than five years (international voters);
- Resident Canadians temporarily outside their electoral district, either inside or outside Canada (national voters); and
- Resident Canadians inside their electoral district (local voters).

Under the provisions of the Special Voting Rules, voters must

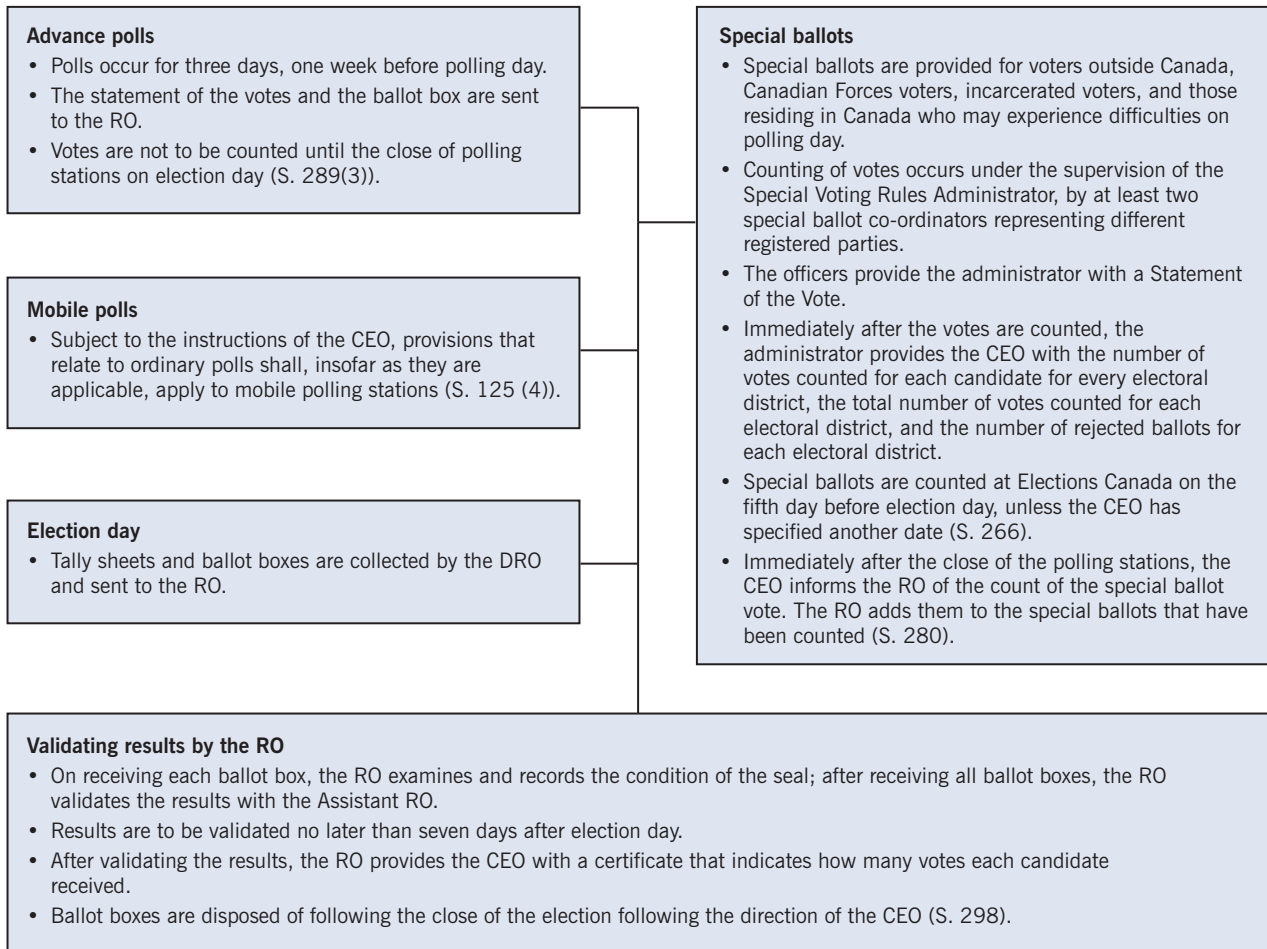
- obtain an Application for Registration and Special Ballot form;
- return this application form to the appropriate returning officer or to Elections Canada, as appropriate, before 6:00 p.m. on Day 6; and
- obtain the names of the candidates in their electoral district to cast a vote.

Voters must return their special ballots so they are received no later than

- 6:00 p.m. on election day (Day 0) at Elections Canada (received from the Deputy Returning Officer from Canadian Forces voters after voting between Day 14 and Day 9);
- 6:00 p.m. on election day at Elections Canada (received from the Deputy Returning Officer from incarcerated voters after voting on Day 10);
- 6:00 p.m. on election day at Elections Canada (received directly from national and international voters); and
- close of the polls of their electoral district on election day (local voters).



## Appendix D Process for counting ballots



CEO Chief Electoral Officer

RO Returning officer

DRO Deputy returning officer

S Section of *Canada Elections Act*

## Appendix E List of recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations found in Chapter 6. The number in front of the recommendation indicates the paragraph where it appears in the chapter. The numbers in parentheses indicate the paragraphs where the topic is discussed.

Recommendation	Department's response
<p><b>Preparedness for an election call</b></p> <p><b>6.41</b> Elections Canada, in collaboration with other public sector organizations, should pursue its efforts and explore additional ways to rationalize and improve the overall efficiency of data collection and management of information on Canadians and Canadian geography. (6.22–6.40)</p>	<p>Elections Canada will continue to be a trailblazer and to provide leadership to rationalize and improve efficiency while providing the best possible service to Canadian electors.</p> <p>We will build on the 36 existing agreements with various federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal agencies to support voter registration. To date, data-sharing partnerships with electoral agencies have resulted in significant savings.</p> <p>The Electoral Technology Accord signed by all provincial and territorial chief electoral officers builds upon data-sharing partnerships and demonstrates their commitment to increased co-operation to achieve cost savings and efficiencies through common processes and services, shared data, and expertise.</p> <p>We will continue to maintain the National Geographic Database with Statistics Canada, as well as partner with Statistics Canada and other federal organizations to develop a common national road network through the Inter-Agency Committee on Geomatics, which is co-chaired by Natural Resources Canada and the Department of National Defence. Finally, we will pursue additional partnerships in this area with the Canada Post Corporation.</p> <p>In June of this year, Elections Canada launched a strategic review of voter registration, in collaboration with all stakeholders, to continue improving list quality and voter registration services. New partnership opportunities are expected to arise from this project.</p> <p>The Chief Electoral Officer's recent report to Parliament on proposed changes to the <i>Canada Elections Act</i> includes recommendations specifically designed to further facilitate register and geography partnerships, such as recommendation 2.20, Sharing Elector Data with Provincial Electoral Authorities for Updating Purposes, and recommendation 2.21, Sharing Neutral Address and Geographic Information.</p>

Recommendation	Department's response
<p><b>Delivering fair and transparent elections</b></p> <p><b>6.57</b> Elections Canada should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assess the cost-effectiveness of its targeted revision activities,</li> <li>• consider other options to REVISE, and</li> <li>• evaluate the effectiveness of its communication strategy. (6.42–6.56)</li> </ul>	<p>The Chief Electoral Officer's recent report to Parliament recommends that revising agents should no longer have to work in pairs while performing targeted revision, a measure that would reduce by half revising agents' fees, related training costs, and travel allowances. Based on the 2004 general election, this would amount to a reduction of some \$2.4 million in the cost of targeted revision. The Chief Electoral Officer has also recommended that there be increased flexibility regarding the registration of electors who are absent when a revising agent visits their residence. That is, the elector answering the door would be able to register other eligible electors residing there, without having to provide proof of identification for them. This would increase registration rates at no additional cost.</p> <p>Elections Canada has already initiated a project to conduct a complete review of its voter registration processes. Data management and systems for lists of electors will also be examined in light of current technological advances.</p> <p>The advertising campaign for the 2004 general election was developed on the basis of the assessment of the campaign used for the 2000 election and the feedback it generated from parliamentarians and others, as well as the evolving strategies for outreach to target groups. As no negative feedback was received on the 2004 campaign, the Chief Electoral Officer decided that Elections Canada would use the same communications program for the next general election. This decision enabled the agency to be ready with a tested program generating significant savings. In accordance with this recommendation, Elections Canada will undertake a review of the campaign after the next general election.</p>
<p><b>Performance measurement and reporting</b></p> <p><b>6.91</b> Elections Canada should enhance the quality of its performance measures and ensure that performance targets and indicators are in place for all of its key activities. (6.86–6.90)</p>	<p>Elections Canada will continue to build on its experience and expertise in establishing comprehensive performance indicators for election readiness and delivery activities, to determine and refine targets and indicators for its ongoing programs, particularly its advertising campaign and its voter education and outreach programs for youth, Aboriginal communities, ethnocultural groups, and people with disabilities.</p>

Recommendation	Department's response
<p><b>6.98</b> Elections Canada should enhance its reporting to Parliament on its future strategic direction and on the progress made in achieving its objectives. (6.92–6.97)</p>	<p>Elections Canada has already undertaken to update its strategic plan. In future appearances before Parliament, the Chief Electoral Officer will continue to draw linkages between the strategic direction of the agency, recommendations to amend electoral legislation to improve the electoral process, and the actual performance of the organization between and during elections.</p>
<hr/> <p><b>Financial and human resources management</b></p>	
<p><b>6.110</b> Elections Canada should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop and implement a human resources plan and a succession plan that are linked to its long-term strategic direction and objectives, and</li> <li>• establish key performance indicators and obtain information on its performance for the management of human resources. (6.99–6.109)</li> </ul>	<p>Elections Canada's human resources plan will be formalized in the context of the <i>Public Service Modernization Act</i>, while continuing to meet the requirements of the <i>Public Service Employment Act</i> and the <i>Canada Elections Act</i>. This plan will be linked to the agency's strategic plan and integrated with the annual business planning cycle.</p> <p>Elections Canada will also review its key performance indicators in the area of human resources management and establish additional indicators in accordance with the needs of the agency.</p>

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