

Yukon Legislative Assembly

Information Sheet No. 5 The Role of a Member of the Legislative Assembly

What is an MLA?

A Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) is elected by the voters in his or her electoral district (a geographic area also called a 'constituency' or 'riding') to represent the people of that electoral district in the Yukon Legislative Assembly. There are 18 MLAs in the Yukon Legislative Assembly each representing a different electoral district whose boundaries are defined in the *Elections Act*.

Getting Elected to the Yukon Legislative Assembly

To sit in the Assembly as an MLA a person must be elected during a general election or a by-election. In order to be eligible for election a person has to be eligible to vote in a territorial election. That is, a person must be a Canadian citizen, who will be 18 years or older on polling day, and who has lived in Yukon for 12 months prior to polling day. A prospective candidate must also file a nomination paper signed by 25 or more qualified voters, have an official agent, and pay a \$200 nomination deposit. If a person wants to run as a candidate for a political party that person must also have the approval of the party's leader.

More information about becoming a candidate in a Yukon election can be found at the Elections Yukon website at <http://www.gov.yk.ca/leg-assembly/elections/>

Once a person has been elected they must then swear an oath or affirmation of allegiance and an oath or affirmation of office. Only after they are 'sworn in' can they take their seat in the Assembly chamber and participate in proceedings.

The MLA's Role

Each MLA may fulfill as many as five distinct roles. As mentioned, an MLA represents the persons who live in his or her electoral district. This involves bringing up issues that concern the people the MLA represents, presenting a petition on their behalf, or assisting in solving a problem a constituent has with the Government of Yukon.

The MLA is also a legislator. This involves understanding existing laws, proposing new laws and studying, discussing and supporting or opposing new laws.

Some MLAs are independent – they do not belong to a political party. However most MLAs have a third role – being a member of a party caucus (a group of MLAs from the same political party). As a caucus member the MLA helps plan and carry out party strategy, supports the caucus and its decisions, and develops expertise in certain subject areas.

An MLA may also serve as a cabinet minister (if his or her party forms the government) or a critic (if his or her party is in opposition).

Finally, an MLA has certain responsibilities as a 'parliamentarian.' This means acting as a representative of the assembly as a whole, rather than their political party. Participation on legislative committees can be seen as acting in the role of

parliamentarian. MLAs may also fulfill this role by participating in inter-parliamentary activities, such as those arranged by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The MLA's duties

MLAs divide their time between work in their constituencies and in the Assembly. Their duties will vary depending on whether they are a cabinet minister, opposition member or government private member (a member of the governing party who is not in cabinet. Also called a 'backbencher').

Opposition members spend much of their time researching and asking questions in the Assembly about their constituencies and about their area of critic responsibilities. Opposition members and government private members present petitions, motions and Private Members' Bills in the Assembly.

MLAs who are cabinet ministers spend much of their time overseeing the operations of their assigned department(s) and/or government corporation(s). Cabinet ministers have to prepare themselves to answer questions from the opposition, put forward government bills, and deal with the estimates (requests for money) and annual reports of their department(s) or corporation(s).

MLAs also serve on committees. All MLAs are members of Committee of the Whole. Others are assigned to one of four standing (permanent) committees. These are:

- the Members' Services Board, which oversees the Legislative Assembly's budget and operations;
- the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, which oversees the spending and operations of government departments, corporations and other entities;
- the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, which recommends changes to the Standing Orders – the rules by which the Assembly operates; or
- the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, which examines regulations made by cabinet.

Persons having problems in their electoral district or in dealing with a government department or corporation can ask their MLA for help. Much of an MLA's time is spent handling these kinds of problems, answering questions, and keeping themselves aware of the issues that concern voters in their electoral district.

MLAs keep in touch with their constituents by personal contact, by phone, by writing letters and emails, through meetings, and by a limited number of mass mailings that are paid for out of the Legislative Assembly's budget.

Each MLA has an office in the Yukon Government's main administration building in Whitehorse. A complete list of Yukon MLAs with contact information can be found at: <http://www.gov.yk.ca/leg-assembly/contact.html>

For more information contact the Office of the Legislative Assembly at
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Or visit the Legislative Assembly's website at: <http://www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca/>