

ELECTIONS SASKATCHEWAN



FIELD LEADERSHIP TEAM NEWSFEED SPECIAL ISSUE

An Introduction to an Evaluation of Elections
Saskatchewan's Delivery of the 28th General Election

November 6, 2015

Why Assess?

It was more than a century ago, on December 13, 1905, that Saskatchewan held its first general election. At that time, only men were allowed to vote, which they did by marking an "X" with a coloured pencil on a blank ballot paper. In advance of that election, candidates had been assigned a colour according to the order in which they were officially nominated. Twenty-seven elections have been held in our province, with preparations now offering considerably more complexity and effort on the part of election administrators than back in 1905.

In recent months, while thinking a great deal about the growing complexity of what we do at Elections Saskatchewan and how we have done things in the past, I have come to realize that a change in our approach is going to be necessary if we are to embrace a modern approach to election administration. We have done well at conducting elections, for sure. But we have never—as an organization—meaningfully assessed the quality of our preparations for an election, its delivery, and its contribution to strengthening our democratic foundations.

In recent months, I have asked for guidance from a number of you on our Field Leadership Team about how we might more effectively understand our approach to administering elections and, ultimately, improve the inner-workings of our elections in the cycle ahead. At present, we are planning an assessment of the performance of Elections Saskatchewan as an organization in delivering the 28th election on behalf of the citizens of Saskatchewan.

The intent of the evaluation is to establish a baseline for assessing the future performance of ESK and, if democratic practices are to be strengthened in the future, it will allow improvement strategies to be developed in consultation with the community and the Legislative Assembly. The planned assessment will be a resource for everyone in Saskatchewan.

The electoral assessment will have three main components, examining:

- The extent to which the citizens of Saskatchewan participate in the election, an important indicator of the health of our democracy;
- The extent to which ESK's stakeholders—including voters, candidates, and political parties—are satisfied with the services we provide;
- Our collective compliance with legislated requirements for the management and handling of ballot papers, from their initial inception to their placement in long term storage and ultimate destruction, as well as the integrity of the voters list.

As Chief Electoral Officer, I believe that all ESK staff should be involved in the assessment of how we—as a team—deliver electoral events on behalf of our community. With this in mind, the coming electoral assessment will provide an opportunity for you to have your voice heard, through a survey of the Field Leadership Team, as well a survey of all election workers. Once the writs have been returned, you will also be involved in a post-election conference where the results of the electoral assessment will be discussed before the assessment's findings are published as part of a legislative report I will provide to the Legislative Assembly.

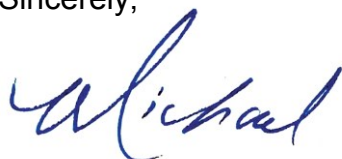
Much of the evaluation will be based on surveys of voters, candidates and political parties. I am keen to ensure that these surveys are useful to ESK and therefore have asked that the University of Saskatchewan's Social Sciences Research Laboratories (SSRL), who we have worked with in the past, consult with members of the FLT as part of the process of developing the questions to be used.

This is a significant project for Elections SK. Your involvement and contributions will be vital to its success. But I would like to stress that the assessment is not about checking on the work of individuals. Rather, this is about us, as an organization, answering a fundamental question I have been asking for several decades in my professional and academic life: How can we know if we've run a good election? The answer to this question is found in assessing our work as we do it.

You will already know that I am convinced the job of supporting democracy through delivering elections is one of the most important mandates in our province. I feel privileged to be associated with so many competent members of our Field Leadership Team who have already expressed an interest in working with us during this evaluative exercise.

In future editions of the Newsfeed, I will provide further detail about the components of the coming electoral evaluation. In the meantime, if you have questions or comments, I hope that you will be in touch with Jeff Kress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter being a large, stylized 'M'.

Dr. Michael Boda
Chief Electoral Officer
Province of Saskatchewan