

### Challenges and Solutions for Hassle-Free Elections

Municipal elections are a crucial time for local democracy. However, organizing them poses a number of recurring challenges for returning officers. Between administrative errors, labour shortages, and managing non-domiciled electors, there are a number of issues that require particular attention. How can you anticipate these difficulties and ensure a smooth, legally compliant election?



# Elections and referendums

Many of the problems Elections Québec professionals frequently see—such as those involving the notice of election or candidate eligibility—have direct repercussions on the way election rules are understood and applied, points out Anne Claire Pelletier, Director of the Service des scrutins municipaux et scolaires at Elections Québec.

“The notice of election is an essential reference document. When it contains errors, it causes confusion among candidates and electors and can lead to complaints. Additionally, when it comes to candidate eligibility for election and the uncertainties that may arise, it’s important to remember that it isn’t the returning officer’s responsibility to adjudicate on a candidate’s eligibility when they apply,” says Ms. Pelletier.

She stresses the importance of clearly communicating the rules that govern the presence of candidates at polling stations to ensure that the voting process runs smoothly.

Furthermore, drawing up the list of electors and dividing it into polling subdivisions are vital but complex steps that have a direct impact on how the right to vote can be exercised. “We have also noticed some misunderstandings when it comes to managing non-domiciled electors and including them on the list of electors,” she states.

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## Structure and organization

Organizing a municipal election is not something that can be improvised. Good planning is essential to avoid problems and ensure that the vote runs smoothly. A structured activity calendar can be used to plan for contingencies and provide greater manoeuvrability.

“It’s important to make use of available resources, such as the returning officer’s library, which provides municipalities with a number of management tools,” stresses Ms. Pelletier.

Another key aspect of the process is meeting administrative and legal deadlines, particularly with regard to sending the request for the list of electors. Participating in the training sessions available to returning officers can help them better understand the challenges of elections and ensure that the vote runs smoothly.

It is also crucial to select qualified election officers, as appointing trustworthy, well-trained employees is key to efficient management, emphasizes the director.

Like all organizations and businesses, the labour shortage complicates the process of selecting and hiring election officers. This is one of the major challenges returning officers face. To succeed, it’s best to plan ahead!

## Good to know

Natural disasters and major events can affect election operations. In exceptional circumstances, the Chief Electoral Officer has special decision-making powers to modify certain rules to maintain the democratic process.

## Support from Elections Québec

Elections Québec will be sending out a number of communications throughout the election year to inform returning officers of steps to take, deadlines, and new directives. It’s essential to pay close attention to these communications and read them promptly.

“Elections Québec plays a key role in helping returning officers organize municipal elections. It offers a wide range of services, including personalized advice and support. A team of professionals is available to answer questions and provide advice tailored to the needs of Québec’s 1,100 municipalities.”

There is also an online platform that provides access to numerous resources designed to make electoral events easier to manage. It includes election calendars, operating procedures, tools for communicating with electors, forms, and reference guides.

Municipal elections are a cornerstone of local democracy, but organizing them involves understanding a multitude of details. With proper preparation, adequate support, and careful management of the electoral processes, elections can be transparent, compliant, and efficient. This election year, vigilance and anticipation will be the watchwords for ensuring the success of the municipal democratic process.

## 2025 municipal elections

**1,098** municipal and **20** RCM electoral events

### Turnout

**38.7 %** in the last municipal elections in 2021

### Municipalities with no opposition

**333** municipalities filled all their positions with no opposition in 2021

### Record number of electoral events

A record **444** electoral events (elections and referendums) occurred in 2023–2024

### Designation of returning officers

Fewer than **10** requests have been made to designate a returning officer other than the director general, but that could change between now and May 1

Source: [Elections Québec](#)