
Chapter 4:

NAVIGATING THE MUNICIPAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

You can empower your nonprofit to engage with your local communities or municipal government by knowing more about the types of decisions it makes, and the services and programs it provides. Being aware of the appropriate avenues to address policy concerns is one of the first steps towards effective advocacy and engagement for your nonprofit. This knowledge can elevate your advocacy efforts by ensuring actors targeted are well positioned to listen, consult, and provide actionable solutions to your concerns.

Municipal Governments

Municipal governments are one of the three orders of government that support the needs of citizens. The Municipal Election Guide is a practical guide for nonprofits wishing to engage in advocacy during the 2021 municipal election across Alberta. This Guide is intended to help inform a range of nonprofit stakeholders, including executive directors, staff, board members, and volunteers, about the context, rules, and strategies that can be used to support nonprofit contributions to public policy dialogue and development.

Municipal governments aim to handle issues facing citizens living within defined municipalities. Alberta has three general types of municipalities: Urban, rural and specialized

- **Urban municipalities** consist of areas where there is a concentration of people and residential dwellings. These include cities, towns, villages and summer villages.
- **Specialized municipalities** are unique municipal structures that can be formed without resorting to special Acts of the Legislature and allow urban and rural communities to coexist in a single municipal government. There are six specialized municipalities in Alberta: Lac La Biche County, Mackenzie County, Municipality of Crowsnest Pass, Municipality of Jasper, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, and Strathcona County.
- **Municipal district**, also known as a county, is a government form in rural areas of the province. They include unincorporated communities such as hamlets and rural residential subdivisions.

Each municipality is governed by a council which consists of several elected councillors that represent the electorate of a municipality. The breakdown of Municipalities in Alberta is as follows:

- Cities: 19
- Towns: 106
- Villages: 81
- Summer Villages: 51
- Specialized Municipalities: 6
- Municipal Districts: 63

While municipal governments have three areas of focus: planning and development; governance and administration; and assessment and taxation, municipal city councils address multiple issues within their jurisdiction. Programs, services and policies that municipalities have jurisdiction over include:

- Recreation and culture
- Community and youth services
- Libraries and museums
- Affordable housing
- Economic development
- Public transportation and parking bylaws
- Parks and public spaces
- Land use planning and development
- Police and emergency services
- Environmental impact and conservation
- Maintenance and upgrading of roadways, bridges, streets and sidewalks
- Garbage collection and recycling
- Waste and water management

Council Responsibilities

City councils aim to address the immediate concerns, needs, and opportunities of the community. For example, the Calgary City Council is the primary governing and legislative body for the City of Calgary. In essence, it ensures The City of Calgary provides citizens with the services they need and desire for the wellbeing of their communities. A council is a governing body elected by residents in the municipality – which includes the mayor and councillors – to adopt legislation and set policy. The council is responsible for the development and evaluation of programs and policies within their jurisdiction. Council members run as independent candidates rather than as members of a political party. This sets them apart from provincial and federal levels of government. Council members hold office for four-year terms.

The council hires a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) who is responsible to council and is the administrative head of the municipality. They ensure that the council members deliver on the council's agenda and priorities and maintains key relationships with other levels of government.¹¹

A council is generally responsible for a multitude of activities including:

- determining goals and priorities;
- developing and approving policies, bylaws and major projects;
- planning and providing programs and services;
- setting the tax rate and approving the municipalities budget;
- hiring the CAO who, in turn, oversees all departments for municipality; and
- representing the municipality.

Municipal councils also have several standing committees, boards and commissions that provide advice and make recommendations to the council on important issues.



Council Roles

Role of Head of Council

Eligible voting residents can elect their head of council or also known as the Mayor, Chief Elected Official or reeve, during an election every four years. The mayor is the face of the municipality, performs the same duties as councillors, is an equal voting member of the council, and has no more formal authority than any other council member.¹² The responsibilities of the mayor include presiding meetings, assisting the governing body in setting goals and advocates policy decisions. The mayor does not have authority to veto legislative actions.

Role of Councillors

Councillors are elected members of a council under the Local Authorities Election Act. Residents can vote for a councillor of the whole municipality unless the municipality is divided into geographical areas called “wards” which are comprised of multiple communities. Only electors of that ward can vote for a councillor who is a resident of that ward. Electors can vote for their councillor within their ward every four years. Councillors also sit on a variety of boards, commissions and committees. Councillors represent the citizens in their ward in making council decisions that have local impact. They participate in council meetings and council committee meetings, and they generally develop and evaluate the policies and programs of the municipalities. Councillors must consider and bring to attention the overall welfare and interests of the municipality and promote an integrated and strategic approach to intermunicipal land use planning and service delivery with neighbouring municipalities.¹³

Council Committees, Boards and Commissions

Municipal governments establish committees, boards and commissions under the Municipal Government Act and municipal bylaws. Committees, boards and commissions act as an advisory panel to the council by making recommendations and providing perspectives on policy issues and issues that impact people in the community. Committees, boards and commissions can be composed solely of citizens or members of council, while others are made up of a combination of citizens and members of council. Examples of council committees include:

- planning and urban development;
- community and protective services;
- transportation and transit;
- community wellbeing;
- finance;
- parks and recreation;
- emergency services;
- arts and culture; and
- tourism.

Committees provide the public with an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and make important headway on the future direction of our communities.

Council/Committee Meetings

Council, committees, boards and commission meetings are scheduled at the beginning of the new term of council where they follow a consistent schedule. Prior to meetings, the public is often provided with an agenda and any supplementary information, such as reports and communications. Nonprofits can provide their input on issues they care about as a schedule and all materials are provided in advance. Meeting days and times can be found on the municipality’s website.

Relationship Between Nonprofits and Municipal Government

Nonprofit organizations have a positive role on our communities, and they play an important role in identifying local voices for decision-makers. Municipalities rely on the nonprofit sector to deliver community services to citizens including affordable housing, children’s services, employment services and arts and cultural programming. The nonprofit sector is an important partner in identifying and responding to emerging community issues. Nonprofit organizations across the province ensure that residents and local voices are heard by policymakers in local governments.

Municipalities and nonprofit organizations collaborate and support communities in multiple ways. Nonprofits and municipalities collaborate in four ways:

1. Investing in Community Service

Municipalities deliver effective programs and services in targeted areas, develop and advance strategies, and construct and manage assets. Municipal governments invest in nonprofits on a wide range of issues, such as: accessible programs and services, improving parenting skills, reinforcing positive child and youth development, shelter services, employment services, support for immigrants, newcomers and refugees, seniors’ programs and services, community support services, strengthening positive social ties for vulnerable people and creating stronger neighbourhoods.

2. Building Nonprofit Capacity

Municipalities provide funding to nonprofit to strengthen their organizational effectiveness, increase their programs’ impact, and address emerging social issues and trends that impact residents in the municipality.

3. Co-Designing Programs & Policies

Nonprofits and municipalities collaborate to design new policies and programs.

4. Engaging Communities and Community Wellbeing

Municipalities rely heavily on nonprofits to promote a vibrant community and to assist and encourage residents to be involved in civic life. Nonprofit often help local governments provide diverse services and programs that contribute to community wellbeing.

Checklist for meeting with city officials¹⁴

1. Find out who you’re going to talk to, what they do, and what they are interested in.
2. Engage in your work with a clear intention to achieve the city’s goals.
3. Identify how the work you will be doing will impact the municipality.
4. The most effective way to convey your message is to do so through the lens of efficiency and effectiveness.
5. Patience and hard work will go a long way to cementing a successful relationship with a city, especially if there’s already synergy between your organization and theirs.

Municipal Elections

During municipal elections, eligible voters in a municipality can vote to elect their mayor, councillors, and school board trustees. In October 2021, electors will also vote on a provincially mandated senate nominee election and two referendum votes. Voters in some municipalities will also respond to a plebiscite vote.

Mayor and Councillors

Municipal councillors may be elected at large or by ward. In a municipality where the councillors are elected at large, all councillors represent the entire municipality. The voters choose among all candidates who are running in the election. For example, if municipal council has six councillor positions, each voter will have six votes; the candidate with the highest number of votes will become the new councillors.

Other municipalities, such as Calgary or Edmonton, are divided into wards with one or more representatives on council. Municipalities differ in the number of councillors they have per ward. Eligible voters can choose to elect candidates running in the election within their ward. The candidate(s) with the highest number of votes will become the councillor for that specific ward.

The mayor or reeve is elected at large by all of the voters in the municipality.

School Boards Trustees

The Alberta Government and the Education Act

Education is a provincial government responsibility in Canada. In Alberta, education is governed principally by the Education Act and its regulations. The Education Act and its regulations identifies roles and responsibilities of the Ministry, school boards, charter schools, private schools, teachers, parents and students. It also sets out the regulations regarding elections and School Board Trustees.

School Board Trustees are locally elected representatives of the public and they are the community's advocate for public education. School Board Trustees are elected every four years in conjunction with municipal elections. Under the Education Act, voters have an option to vote for public or a separate school division during the municipal election, but not both.

Trustees are responsible for contributing to the formation of decisions that benefit the school board, while representing the interests of their constituents, as well as communicating decisions made by the board back to their constituents. Trustees represent the residents in the school division they live in. They are responsible for dealing with a number of issues such as budgets and finance, property issues and communications with the community. The number of Trustees can vary for each school division but there are more than three per school board.

Senate Nominees

Historically, there have been four previous Senate Elections in Alberta: 1989, 1998, 2004 and 2012.¹⁵ In July 2020, legislation was passed by the Government of Alberta Legislative Assembly to reinstate Senate nominee elections.¹⁶ Senate nominees are put forward to the Queen's Privy Council for Canada for filling future vacancies related to Alberta in the Senate of Canada. The legislation for Senate Elections is provincial in nature governed by the Alberta Senate Elections Act.

On June 23, 2021, the Order in Council and Writ of Election for the 2021 Alberta Senate Election was issued to hold an election to select three Senate candidates. As a result, in this upcoming election the three candidates who receive the highest number of votes province-wide will become Senate nominees.

Nominations for the Senate Election will close on September 20, 2021. This means that on October 18, 2021, in conjunction with the municipal election, eligible voters across municipalities in Alberta will be provided with an opportunity to cast a Senate vote. This is largely symbolic, and all nominees are provided to the prime minister as a Senate nominee in a Senate Election.

Elector information can be found [here](#).

Referendum Votes

A referendum vote is the process of asking a political question to an electorate for direct decision by general vote. In Alberta, the Referendum Act allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to order a referendum on constitutional or non-constitutional questions.

In conjunction with the 2021 municipal election, there will be two Referendum Votes on October 18, 2021. Elections Alberta states that a Referendum will commence with the issuance of an Order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The latest date that the order may be issued for a Referendum Vote to take place with the 2021 Alberta Municipal Elections is September 7, 2021.

- Question on equalization payments: The question on the ballot would ask, “should Section 36(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982 — Parliament and the Government of Canada’s commitment to the principle of making equalization payments — be removed from the Constitution?”
 - A “yes” vote will not mean that equalization will be modified as the question of equalization is under federal government authority. [Click here](#) for more information.
- Question on daylight saving time: Should Alberta end the practice of changing our clocks twice a year? [Click here](#) for more information.

Elector information can be found [here](#).

Plebiscite Vote

A plebiscite is an important public issue driven by citizens, through a petition or by a council, that is then voted on directly by citizens. The results of a vote regarding a plebiscite can be binding or non-binding. For example, on February 1, 2020, Calgary City Council voted in favour of a plebiscite on re-introducing fluoride into the water in Calgary. The plebiscite question that Calgarians will be asked is: “are you in favour of reintroducing fluoridation of the municipal water supply?” In the event of an affirmative vote to this question, the Mayor will write to the provincial government asking that they take on the cost of fluoridation of the water supply as a public health intervention.

Ready to engage, but still not sure what to connect with the government about?

Here is a list of ideas to get you started:

- Share the successes and impact of your nonprofit.
- Share your visions of the future for your nonprofit or the sector.
- Share different approaches for tackling common issues.
- Share how government programs and services are experienced in the community.
- Indicate needs for your nonprofit or the sector.

Three Levels of Government: Who Does What?

Understanding the different levels of government and strategically addressing concerns to the right level, will go a long way to ensure your nonprofit achieves its advocacy goals. To clarify these roles, the following chart lays out the high-level responsibilities of each level of government. Note that some responsibilities, such as environmental management, are the responsibility of more than one level of government.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT addresses the needs of all Canadians, examples including:

- Aboriginal Laws and Rights (overlaps with provincial government)
- Canadian Pension Plan and Old Age Security
- Employment Insurance Benefits
- Income Tax Act
- Criminal Law
- Immigration Policies (overlaps with provincial government)

THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT places its primary concern on the needs of Albertans, examples including:

- Education and Training
- Health Programs, Services and Regulations
- Family and Social Services
- Employment and Labour Standards

THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT aims to handle issues facing citizens living within defined municipalities and local communities, examples including:

- Affordable Housing (overlaps with federal government)
- Community and Youth Services
- Public Transportation and Parking Bylaws
- Libraries, Parks and Public Spaces
- Waste and Water Management

[CLICK TO DOWNLOAD THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT: WHO DOES WHAT?](#)

Third-Party Advertising for Local Elections in Alberta

Third-party advertising rules are meant to ensure that the public is aware of who is placing and paying for political and election advertising at the different levels of government. Third-party advertisers can be an individual, corporation or group operating in Alberta, however, a registered charity is not eligible to register as a third-party advertiser.

For local or municipal elections across Alberta, “election advertising” in the Local Authorities Election Act (LAEA) refers to advertising that promotes or opposes a candidate during an election advertising period (the election advertising period starts on May 1, until the end of polling day).

Issue-based advertising during an election does not require registering as a third-party advertiser. However, nonprofits that are not registered charities are required to register as third-party advertisers if they have incurred or plan to incur expenses of at least \$1,000 for election advertising, or they have accepted, or plan to accept, at least \$1,000 in election advertising contributions. There are no limits on election advertising expenses and contributions can be donated to more than one third-party advertiser but the total contributions cannot exceed \$30,000 during the election advertising period.

Election advertising includes:

- Canvassing for the benefit of a candidate
- Organizing events where the primary purpose of the event is to promote or oppose a candidate
- TV, radio, newspaper ads
- Signs, billboards, posters
- Newsletters, brochures, mailing inserts
- Ads on the internet with a placement cost (pay-per-click, paid social media, pop-up ads, etc.).

Election advertising does NOT include:

- Editorial, debate, speech, interview, column, letter, news
- Book distribution or promotion
- Communication by a corporation to employees or shareholders
- Sharing political views on the internet (blogs, posts on social media that are not paid)
- Phone calls encouraging voter participation
- Advertising by local jurisdictions (i.e., The City of Calgary, Elections Calgary)
- Unintended information/advertising in another jurisdiction

Please [click here](#) for third-party advertising guidelines for local elections in Alberta.

LOCAL RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: POLICY ADVOCACY			
REGULATORY AREA	REGULATION	APPLIES TO	DOES NOT APPLY TO
CRA Regulations	Charities can engage in unlimited public policy dialogue and development activities, so long as these activities further their charitable purpose(s) and do not involve the direct or indirect support of, or opposition to, any candidate for public office.	Registered charities.	All other nonprofits (not registered charities).
Local Authorities Election Act	Must register if have spent or plan to spend \$1,000 or more on political advertising.	All nonprofits (not registered charities).	Registered charities

[CLICK TO DOWNLOAD RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AT A GLANCE](#)