

# Learning the Political Landscape



**CAMPAIGN****SCHOOL**  
for women

# Introduction

**So, you have decided to run for elected office – congratulations! It is important to understand the political processes and realities, and to identify which level of government aligns with your goals and priorities.**

This booklet will provide a snapshot of the different levels of government, roles and responsibilities of elected officials, and partisan politics.

The information in this section is useful both for candidates as well as anyone involved in the campaigns to get women elected.

Constituents may not always know the different responsibilities and jurisdictions of various levels of government, but they do know what the most pressing issues are in their world. It is important for candidates and elected leaders to know which issues are pertinent, and within their scope of responsibility and influence, to help their

constituents understand what their powers and limitations are, and to avoid making promises they are unable to fulfill.

This booklet provides an overview of how partisan politics works in Nova Scotia and federally, and includes, among other topics, securing a nomination, party leadership, and running as an independent.

Each party also produces resources for candidates which are helpful in learning the ins and outs of how each party is structured, what obligations candidates have, etc. For further information, visit the party's website, or call their head office (See the *Resources* booklet for contact information).

**The political landscape is complex** – as a prospective candidate, it is important to understand this landscape in greater detail.



# Understanding the Issues

No matter what level of elected office you choose, it is crucial to stay current on national, provincial, and local issues. You can never know what issue may become relevant to voters in your area.

Regardless of your agenda, the public and the media will expect you to be knowledgeable on a variety of issues. They will assess and judge you based on your awareness of, and responses to, the issues affecting your community.

Keep in mind that the public may not know what level of government is responsible for the issues important to them. Knowing the jurisdictional responsibilities for various levels of government is an important part of politics.

Research current issues by becoming familiar with, and stay up-to-date on, the issues important to your community before and during the campaign.

Increasing your knowledge and community engagement will not only prepare you to speak to current issues on the campaign trail

and beyond, but also can help you to broaden your networks in the community.

Scan the headlines, collect relevant articles, and, if possible, have a member of your team track how current issues are affecting, or could affect, the local community and electorate. While you may not be able to anticipate every question, you can become familiar with the issues important to your community before, during, and after your campaign.

**Social media** is increasingly becoming the primary way people find, share, and react to what's happening locally and globally. A strong social media presence can spread your message, and following constituents, leaders, and organizations in your community can help you stay aware of what is important in your community and electoral district.

**Follow organizations and your constituents on social media to get their thoughts on the issues that matter to them. Gather information from all sides of the issue, including where all parties stand.**



While social media currently dominates how people express their views, **public meetings** remain a critical source of information. Send a representative to take notes, to gather relevant materials, reports, briefs, and presentations if you are unable to attend.

Reach out to the spheres of influence in the community who have rallied around a particular issue, and learn first-hand about their concerns and ideas. This can help increase your awareness of the issue, as well as earn the trust of those most invested as they see you listen, share, and respond to their concerns in these public forums.

**Find a mentor.** Having political mentors and spheres of influence are crucial to raising your awareness of the issues.

**Spheres of influence** are people within the community with a level of knowledge or expertise that you can identify with and learn from. They can provide information that will help you define your own position and build your position into your platform regarding specific issues, or influence the platform and policy statements in your political party. Connect with people who have run, been elected, or engaged in campaigns, to seek out a mentor or mentors who can provide advice and guidance.

If you are involved in partisan politics, your caucus offices, party websites, and contacts are additional primary sources of information.

Contact information for political parties in Nova Scotia can be found in the *Resources* booklet.

# Understanding Party Politics

**The level of politics you choose will be influenced by your interests and the public policy areas you want to affect.**

To identify and confirm the level where you would have the most impact and interest, reflect on the priority issues you have identified (see the *Deciding to Run* booklet), and determine what level of government has jurisdiction over most of those issues.

## **Jurisdictions: who does what?**

The lines between federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions are not always clear – and in some areas have started to blur. This can cause confusion for constituents who want their issue addressed and may not know who to call.

Mi'kmaw Band Councils have a wide range of responsibilities that include what would typically be municipal, provincial, and federal matters.

The following is a high-level outline of the primary areas of jurisdiction for federal, provincial, and municipal governments:

**The federal government** creates laws and manages programs and services that affect the whole country. The federal government is made up of Members of Parliament (MPs) from each province or territory in Canada. The political party that elects the most MPs forms the government, and their party leader becomes the Prime Minister.

Duties of MPs vary depending on whether their political party forms the government, the official opposition, or the third party.

MP responsibilities increase if they belong to the governing party and are given a Cabinet portfolio. This gives them the responsibility of decision-making regarding federal departments.

MPs not part of the governing party often carry critic responsibilities that shadow the Cabinet portfolios, and hold the Ministers to account in the House.

MPs also act as ombudspersons and advocates for the needs of their constituents and communities. This is done through each MP's Constituency Office.

**Provincial governments** are responsible for issues that affect their province. In Nova Scotia, the provincial government is made up of the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), elected officials that represent a geographical area called a riding. The political party with the most MLAs forms the government, and their party leader becomes the Premier.

If an MLA is part of the governing party, their responsibilities increase if they are given a Cabinet portfolio, which gives them the responsibility for a provincial department and legislation.

MLAs not part of the government often carry critic responsibilities that shadow the Cabinet portfolios and hold the Ministers to account in the House.

MLAs also act as ombudspersons and advocates for the needs of their constituents and community through each MLA's Constituency Office.

**Municipal governments** receive their power from the provincial government. The leader of a municipal government is the Mayor, and municipal councils typically include a number of elected councilors, that collectively make decisions on municipal matters.

**In Mi'kmaw communities**, band councils most resemble the functions of municipal governments, but also have responsibilities in areas similar to provincial and federal jurisdictions. The members of a Mi'kmaw band elect a Chief and Councillors who make decisions that affect their local community.

*For more information on band elections, please contact your band office.*

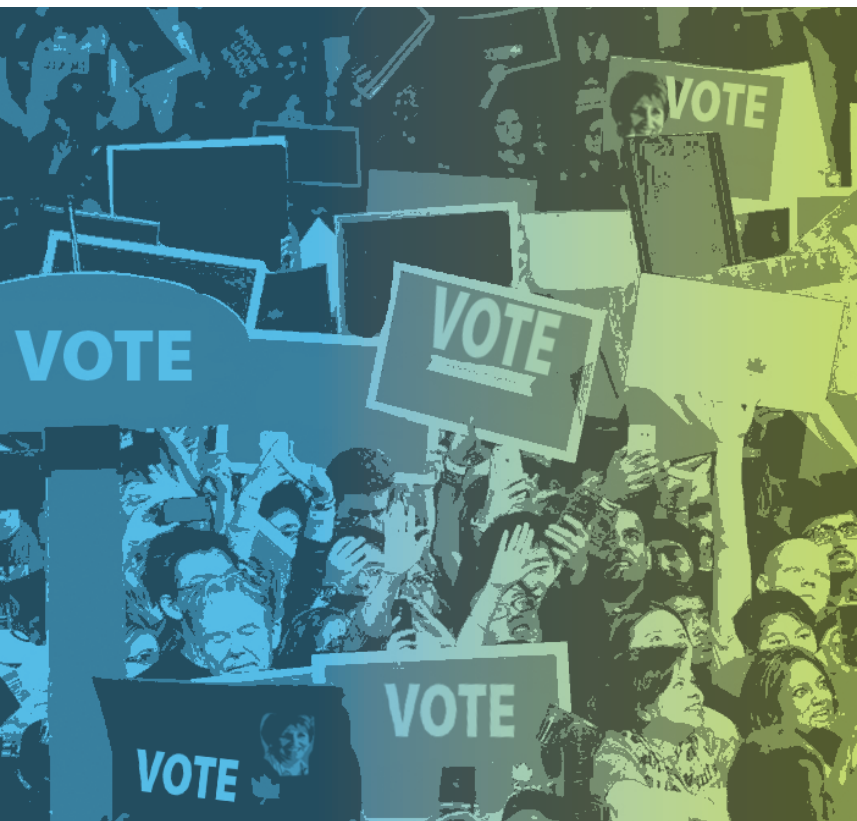
## Jurisdictional responsibilities

Federal	Provincial	Municipal
National defense	Health and hospitals	Building permits & zoning
Criminal law	Administration of justice	Land use planning
Foreign affairs	Education	City parks & recreation
Employment insurance	Property & civil rights	Police services
Money & banking	Workplace safety	Emergency services
Census	Rules of the road	Libraries
Citizenship	Age of majority	Public transportation
Post offices	Natural resources	Waste collection
Shipping & railways	Environment	Fire prevention
Telephones	Social services	Roads & sidewalks
Pipelines	Highways	Animal control
Aboriginal lands & rights	Housing	
Copyright law		Economic development
Taxes (individual jurisdictional taxes)		
Tourism & culture		

## Learning what the job of elected official entails at each level

- Spend time at Council meetings, in the visitor's gallery at the House of Assembly, or watch House of Commons proceedings.
- Get a feel for the different roles that each member plays.
- Review meeting materials and reports to get a sense of the issues that will be debated.
- Review provincial and federal legislative agendas, bills, and processes.
- Attend committee meetings, public meetings, and events.

In addition to representing constituents, which is common in every level of government, provincial and federal elected officials that are part of the governing party may also be assigned Cabinet portfolios and ministerial responsibilities. Members of the opposition may take on critic responsibilities that shadow Cabinet portfolios, and hold Ministers to account in the House.



## Party Leadership

Every federal and provincial political party has a leader. Leadership campaigns are run in the same format as election campaigns, except that only party members can vote in leadership campaigns.

Based on the general elections, the winning political leader becomes the Premier or Prime Minister of the incoming government.

# Identifying Your Party

If you are considering political participation in provincial or federal elections, you probably have a sense of which political party's approach to various issues fits your own.

If you do not know each party platform, you can find them on party websites, or request the documents and literature from party or caucus offices.

Volunteering is one of the best ways to become familiar with the party structure, platform, and various components of a campaign. Political parties welcome volunteers in a variety of roles, during and between elections. Contact the party offices, or the riding association in your area, to find out what roles are available.

There are also many opportunities to be a part of your riding association's executive committee, and even be a member of the

nomination committee, to give you insights into the process before you decide to put your name forward.

Some political parties maintain active women's organizations that support their female members and encourage women who may be interested in politics.

Each party also conducts their own election-readiness workshops.

While partisanship does not play the same role at the municipal level, political parties monitor municipal politicians with a view to encouraging them to seek provincial and federal nominations. Many people elected at the municipal level move on to provincial or federal politics later in their careers.

**Volunteering** is one of the best ways to become familiar with the party structure, platform, and various components of a campaign.

# How well do you know the Parties?

If you are entering partisan politics, it is important to know the party you will be representing before you commit to running.

**Party:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the party's mission?**

---

---

**What are the party's policies and platforms?**

---

---

**What are the fundamental principles and values of the party?**

---

---

**Does the party have a particular ideology? If so, what is it?**

---

---

**Does the party promote women's political participation? If so, how?**

---

---

**What is the leadership structure of the party? Are women present in leadership positions?**

---

---

**What are the criteria for becoming a member of the party?**

---

---

**What are the rights and responsibilities of party members (ie: fundraising)?**

---

---

**How are candidates selected by the party?**

---

---

**How does the party align with your personal values and ideologies?**

---

---

# Securing a Party Nomination

**While securing the party nomination is often the hardest step in succeeding to elected office, women who prevail in a contested nomination often win the election.**

Securing a party nomination for a provincial or federal campaign may be more difficult than winning an actual election. Internal party politics, which may include barriers, discrimination, and the “old boys club” that still exists, can make it difficult for women to gain party support at the local level.

However, obstacles within party structures are gradually being eliminated. Formal and informal policies are being devised to increase the number of women working within party organizations and running as electoral candidates.

At the constituency level, most parties strike a search committee to encourage prospective candidates to seek nominations. The membership of a recognized party constituency nominates a person to represent the party in an election. There may be one individual asked to run who secures the nomination by acclamation, or two or more people may compete to become a party representative.

Aside from a candidate’s perceived chances of winning an election, party service can influence the nomination of candidates in closely contested ridings, especially for party leadership.

## Party Membership

Officially become a member of your party if you haven’t already done so. You must be a member of the party before seeking party nomination.

Also, as a party member, you can introduce debate and pass resolutions for party policy, bringing forward issues of interest to you and to those you seek to represent.

Unless you intend to run without any political affiliation, you must go through a party’s nomination process.



## Running as an Independent

Running without political affiliation is rare in provincial or federal politics.

Without party funds or resources, running and winning an election as an independent can be difficult and expensive at both the provincial and federal level.

It is more common for an elected representative to leave a party while in office and sit as an independent, but they are rarely re-elected.

The reverse is true for municipal politics. Overt party affiliation would not usually provide an advantage. As well, there are no party funds for candidates at this level.

## Running as an Independent



# Qualifying as a Candidate

The following table summarizes the **eligibility requirements for candidates**. Please check the appropriate election act and amendments to ensure that the information is current at the time you are running.

	<b>Municipal</b>	<b>Provincial</b>	<b>Federal</b>
<b>Minimum age</b>	18	18	18
<b>Citizenship</b>	Canadian citizen	Canadian citizen	Canadian citizen
<b>Residency requirements</b>	6 months in the electoral district, or annexed district, and continue to reside	Resident of NS for at least 6 months	No, see the Act
<b>Number of nomination signature</b>	At least 5 qualified voters	At least 5 qualified voters	50 or 100 depending on the electoral district, see the Act
<b>Appointment of Official Agent</b>	Required	Required	Required
<b>Statement of party affiliation and confirmation</b>	None	Required unless running as an independent	Required
<b>Nomination day</b>	2nd Tuesday in September	Tuesday, 14 days before the election	Monday, 21 days before election day
<b>Usual polling day</b>	3rd Saturday in October	Always a Tuesday	3rd Monday in October
<b>Campaign period</b>	Typically 8 weeks	4-5 weeks	Not less than 30 days. Typically 34 – 36 days.
<b>Usual time between elections</b>	4 years	4 years	4 years
<b>Limits to campaign spending</b>	None	See the Act	See the Act









**Nova Scotia  
Advisory Council on  
the Status of Women**

[www.women.gov.ns.ca](http://www.women.gov.ns.ca)

Copyright 2018