

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN LONDON & MIDDLESEX



Volunteering in the Community



Your Rights and Responsibilities to Vote



Voicing Your Concerns



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

This Civic Engagement Handbook has been adapted from *Civic Engagement for Immigrant Women* produced by Calgary Immigrant Women's Association for the Calgary immigrant women population.

This handbook was conceptualized by the London Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership LMLIP's Inclusion and Civic Engagement Sub-council.

This handbook was adapted in London Middlesex by the Network for an Inclusive Community (NIC) and the London Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LMLIP).

The handbook can be found and downloaded free of charge from the [London Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership](#). This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part for any non-commercial purpose relating to civic engagement. It has also been translated into three other languages – Arabic, French, and Spanish.

Acknowledgements

The adaptation of this document for London and Middlesex, Ontario was made possible by the RBC Collaborative Community Project Grant Community Engaged Learning at Western University Student Success Centre: Careers, Leadership and Experience Western University London, Ontario.

Thanks to Western University students Melissa Hughes, Madilyn Lavalee, Emily Nguyen and Sabine Elejel for their work on the project.



We are also grateful to Pillar Nonprofit Network who supported the final layout of this document.





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

Table of Contents

WHAT IS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	4
WHAT IS IN THIS HANDBOOK.....	4
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CANADIAN.....	4
CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS	5
CANADIAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES.....	6
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN CANADA	7
VOLUNTEERING IN THE COMMUNITY	8
WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING	8
WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING?	8
WHERE CAN I VOLUNTEER.....	8
WHAT IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION	10
OTHER WAYS TO VOLUNTEER IN YOUR COMMUNITY	11
BECOME A MEMBER OF A BOARD OF DIRECTORS	11
GETTING INVOLVED WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL.....	12
POLICE BACKGROUND CHECK	12
ELECTIONS AND VOTING	13
VOTING IS THE RIGHT OF ALL CANADIANS	13
HOW GOVERNMENT WORKS.....	13
HOW CANADA BECAME A COUNTRY	14
THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT IN CANADA	14
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE.....	15
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE.....	18
MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE.....	19
WARD MAP OF LONDON, ONTARIO.....	20
POLITICAL PARTIES.....	20
WHAT DO THE PARTIES DO	21
WHAT IS CAMPAIGNING	21
THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM	21
PROVINCIAL POLITICAL PARTIES	21
HAVING A PUBLIC VOICE	22
WRITING A LETTER OF COMPLAINT OR CONCERN	22
SPEAK ABOUT A COMPLAINT OR CONCERN	24
LEAD YOUR COMMUNITY INTO ACTION	25
REFERENCES	27



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

WHAT IS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement means people participating in social and political activities within their community and their country.

As a new Canadian, you are now a member of the country and of your local community. You can participate in civic activities on your own or with your family in your local community, or at the city, provincial, and/or national levels. Taking part in civic activities helps build your community and shape the nation. You also take steps towards social integration and inclusion. As you become an active citizen in your community, your culture, history, and values become a part of Canada and Canada becomes a part of you. This kind of civic responsibility creates productive, responsible, caring and contributing members of a society.

WHAT IS IN THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook gives you information on how to become part of your community and become involved in decision-making processes. It includes information on what your rights and responsibilities in Canada are, how to vote, how to contact local government officials, how to join the school council at your child's school, and how to voice your opinion on matters that are important to you. Learning about the importance of volunteering and being involved in civic activities such as voting will help you settle in Canada and become part of the country.

To help you learn, this handbook has been translated into three other languages: Arabic, French and Spanish.

This handbook covers the three areas of civic participation:

- i) Volunteering in the Community
- ii) Elections and Voting
- iii) Having a Public Voice

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CANADIAN

Most Canadians share similar beliefs and values about how they want to live and what their country means to them. Canadians believe in democracy and encourage all citizens to participate in society. All Canadian citizens should have equal access to power through participation and voting. Canadian values include freedom, respect for cultural differences and a commitment to social justice. All citizens have certain rights and responsibilities. The rights of Canadians are protected by the law and are based on the belief everyone is entitled to basic human rights. The responsibility of Canadians is to live by the rules of our society and be respectful of the differences between us.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is a law of Canada. It protects the individual rights and freedoms of all Canadian citizens. It is an important document. It also protects YOU.

Rights **protected** by the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*:

- Right to life, liberty, and security
- Right to vote and to run in an election
- Right to apply for a passport
- Right to enter, remain in and leave Canada
- Right from unreasonable search and seizure
- Right not to be detained without reason
- Right to equal treatment under the law and no discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability

Freedoms **entrenched** in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms:

- Freedom of conscience and religion
- Freedom of thought
- Freedom of belief
- Freedom of opinion
- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of peaceful assembly
- Freedom of association





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

CANADIAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is important to know that all Canadians have rights and responsibilities towards our country. Civic participation also means that you use your rights and your responsibilities as a citizen and resident of your community. Remember that for every right there is usually a matching responsibility.

Table 1 Rights, Participation and Responsibilities

Rights	Participation	Responsibilities
A right is something that a person is entitled to. It is the freedom to do something protected by law.	Participation means taking part in your society. Participation means contributing your ideas and helping your community.	A responsibility is something that a person is expected to do.
Example It is your legal right as a citizen to vote freely in an election.		Example It is your responsibility as a citizen to obey the law, respect others and treat others fairly.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN CANADA



The overall goal of civic engagement is to be involved, and to be heard, in order to make a difference in public life. Civic engagement focuses on defining good, reforming policies, and seeking out how to attain betterment for the community.



VOLUNTEERING IN THE COMMUNITY

WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is the practice of people working on behalf of others without being motivated by financial or personal gain. A volunteer is a person who helps others without being paid. Usually you volunteer to do something for others, promote good, or improve your community. Volunteering provides the foundation of non-profit organizations.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING?

For many immigrants in Canada, it can be difficult to meet new people and make new friends, especially when English is not your first language. Volunteering is a great way to get out of the house, meet new people and learn about Canadian society. Below outlines some benefits of volunteering.

BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

- Be part of improving your community
- Support causes that you care about
- Gain confidence in yourself
- Gain knowledge about Canada
- Gain Canadian experience that may be beneficial to your work
- Meet new people and make new friends
- Express your ideas and opinions
- Share with Canadian people about your culture
- Know that you are making a positive difference in your community
- Improve your English skills; practice your writing skills

WHERE CAN I VOLUNTEER

The best way to begin volunteering is to start in your neighbourhood. By volunteering your time and skills locally, you will be directly helping the people in your neighbourhood and city, and in turn, enhancing the overall well-being of your community.

Take a look at the local newspapers or the bulletin board of your neighbourhood's library. They may post volunteering opportunities including, but not limited to, sports events, park cleanups, and meal preparations at community centers. Most local organizations are always looking for new volunteers.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES IN GENERAL

- Help organize an event
- Help a child with a school subject
- Serve breakfast/lunch/dinner to homeless or less-fortunate people
- Answer the telephone at a non-profit organization
- Do translation or interpretation
- Make follow-up phone calls to clients or customers

Below is a list of some London and Middlesex community non-profit organizations and their websites:

Visit the [Alzheimer Society London and Middlesex](#)
Visit the [Big Brothers Big Sisters of London and Area](#)
Visit the [Boys & Girls Club of London](#)
Visit the [Canadian Mental Health Association – Middlesex](#)
Visit [Community Living London](#)
Visit the [Cross Cultural Learner Centre](#)
Visit the [Glen Cairn Community Resource Centre](#)
Visit [Growing Chefs Ontario](#)
Visit [Habitat for Humanity Heartland Ontario](#)
Visit [John Howard Society of London & District](#)
Visit the [Kiwanis Seniors' Community Centre](#)
Visit the [London Food Bank](#)
Visit the [London Humane Society](#)
Visit the [London InterCommunity Health Centre](#)
Visit [Meals on Wheels](#)
Visit [Mission Services of London](#)
Visit [ReForest London](#)
Visit the [Sexual Assault Centre London](#)
Visit the [Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre](#)
Visit the [St. Joseph's Hospice](#)
Visit [S.W.I.M.](#) (Single Women in Motherhood)
Visit the [Unity Project](#)
Visit the [United Way – Elgin Middlesex](#)
Visit the [Victorian Order of Nurses - Middlesex-Elgin](#)
Visit the [YMCA of Western Ontario](#)



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

WHAT IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

¹Just as its name suggests, a non-profit organization is an organization that carries out its activities without the intention of making a profit. While a non-profit corporation can earn a profit, any profit made must be used to further the mandate of the organization.

A non-profit corporation can be a church or church association, school, charity, medical provider, activity clubs, volunteer services organization, professional association, research institute, museum, or in some cases a sports association. Below is a chart containing contact and general information about particular non-profit organizations that exist at the local/city, provincial, and national levels in Canada.

Local/City Level

[London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership](#) - Supports newcomers in integrating and promotes cultural diversity

[Pillar Non-Profit Network](#) - Supports and promotes volunteering opportunities from community organizations

[Reforest London](#) - Enhances environmental and human health, and educates the community about environmental protection

National Level

[Canadian Diabetes Association](#) - Promotes the health of Canadians and works to eliminate diabetes

[Habitat for Humanity](#) - Recruits volunteers and community partners to build affordable housing and promotes home ownership as a means to break the cycle of poverty

International Level

[UNICEF](#) - Works to protect the rights of children all over the world and help meet their basic needs

[World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#) - Protects natural areas, plants and animals by promoting the protection of nature and the environment

¹ Adapted from Canadian Corporate Centre, FAQ



OTHER WAYS TO VOLUNTEER IN YOUR COMMUNITY

BECOME A MEMBER OF A BOARD OF DIRECTORS

What is a Board of Directors?

Every non-profit or charitable organization has a Board of Directors that is responsible for overseeing the organization and setting up policies and objectives. Many non-profit organizations are always looking for new board members. If you are interested in the goals and beliefs of a specific non-profit, you can contact them to find out how to become a board member. For more information, check the organization's website, phone or email them.

The duties of a Board of Directors may include:

- Governing the organization by setting up policies and objectives
- Choosing, hiring, supporting, and reviewing the performance of the Chief Executive
- Ensuring the availability of adequate financial resources
- Approving annual budgets
- Reporting to the public about the organization's performance

The qualifications to be on a Board of Directors may include:

- Understanding of and interest in the values and mission of the non-profit organization
- Valuable expertise. Depending on the position on the Board, needed expertise may be in the areas of finance, strategic planning, fundraising, etc.
- Ability to commit time and energy – you will be required to attend a monthly Board meeting, work on a delegated task, and help with community/fundraising events of the organization

Please be aware that being a member of a Board of Directors is a volunteer position. Although there will be a higher level of responsibility and expectation, you do not need to be an expert or have professional leadership experience to qualify. Most non-profit organizations look for people who have genuine interest and are able to commit to being on the Board of Directors.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

GETTING INVOLVED WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

Many opportunities exist for parents to get involved with their child's school. You can volunteer to help organize different activities or events, or you can be involved with the school council. Phone your child's school office to find out if you can volunteer with them.

Become a Parent Volunteer

There are many meaningful and enjoyable ways you can help schools. Examples include:

- Serve fun lunches to students
- Help supervise on field trips
- Coach a school team
- Help with different tasks in the classroom, library or office
- Help supervise at a school dance
- Organize special events for students
- Help with school plays and concerts
- Read with students who need extra support

Become Part of a School Council

Many schools in Canada will have a school council, which is a group of people who work together to support students. Usually a school council is made up of parents, teachers, principals, staff and community representatives. They hold regular meetings to give advice and opinions on matters related to academic programs, school policies and school budgeting. Being part of a school council allows parents to be part of the education of their children and make a difference in the school.

POLICE BACKGROUND CHECK

In Canada, the process of getting a background check is mandatory for anyone who works and/or volunteers with children, seniors, or other vulnerable persons. For example, anyone who volunteers at your child's school will be required to provide a background check. This is when the local police search their local database to check whether an individual has been convicted of a crime. The police record may also contain information such as a person's mental health or pending charges. The background check may also involve contacting the Canadian Police Information Centre (CIPC) and other police departments in Canada and United States.

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, an individual may not be discriminated against because of race, age, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, health conditions or pardoned charges. However, if you have a police record in Canada or United States, certain non-profit organizations may not allow you to volunteer with them.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

Generally, unless you have consented, the police will not disclose your background record to non-profit organizations. To obtain a police background check, you can fill out a request form at the local police station. A piece of official identification document will be required, such as a driver's license. For volunteers in London, the fee for a police background check is charged and it takes approximately 4 weeks to get the document. You (the applicant) will be required to pay this fee. You should check with the non-profit organization to see if they have an agreement with the police to waive the fee or offer a discount.

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

VOTING IS THE RIGHT OF ALL CANADIANS

When you become a citizen of Canada, you will have a right and responsibility to vote. This right is protected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is a responsibility because all people have a duty to participate in choosing the leaders for their nation. This is how societies develop and governments learn how to run themselves better and more efficiently. This is how we choose the leader of the country, the province or the city.

Voting in Canada happens in secret. This means that you can vote freely for any person running in an election without fear of persecution. In Canada, the police, the military, and government have no right to tell you who to vote for. You cannot be arrested or put in prison for voting in a certain way.

It is important to remember that every vote counts, and as a citizen of Canada, you have the power to vote for the person you think will do the best job. When you vote in Canada, the party with the biggest number (majority) of votes in an election becomes the leading party.

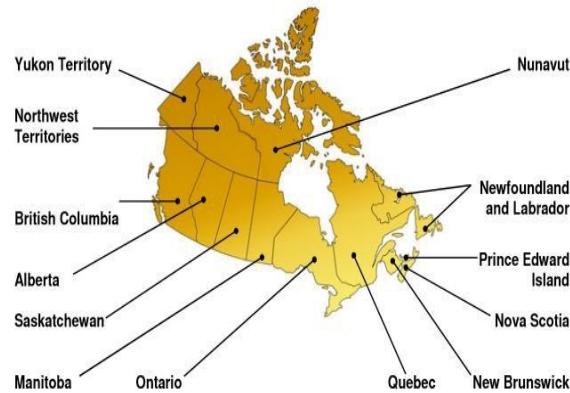


HOW GOVERNMENT WORKS

Canada is a large country with 10 provinces, 3 territories and a population of more than 30 million people. Canada has a federal style of government. This means each province or territory has its own government structure that works with the federal government in Ottawa, Ontario. The relationship between the provincial and the federal governments is based on cooperation and understanding.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS



HOW CANADA BECAME A COUNTRY

Canada became a country in 1867 when the Queen of England signed the British North America Act. This was a law recognizing Canada as an independent country and giving it a Constitution. A constitution is a set of rules that outlines the structure and principles of the government. These rules describe who has political authority, the clear division of powers between federal and provincial governments, and the limits of governmental power.

Canada is a Constitutional Monarchy which means our Head of State is a hereditary Monarch from the United Kingdom. The head of government is an elected Prime Minister. Government in Canada follows the principles of parliamentary democracy, including giving citizens the right to vote in election; having representatives from all regions; and, voting by secret ballot. The government answers to citizens and can be changed by the people. Citizens have the freedom to participate in political and social activities that build communities and shape the nation.

THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT IN CANADA

Government makes decisions and laws to meet the needs of Canadians. There are three levels of government in Canada. They all use a democratic process in electing their members, as well as in making and managing rules and laws, but they differ in location, size, and responsibilities.

Federal Government - makes laws for the whole country

Provincial Government - makes laws for their own province

Municipal Government - makes bylaws for their own city or town

Each level of government has different responsibilities. Generally, the federal government takes responsibility for issues that affect all of Canada but shares some responsibilities with provincial governments. The provincial and territorial governments look after more regional matters. The municipal governments look after local matters.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

Table 2 Each Level of Government's Responsibilities

Federal Responsibilities	Provincial Responsibilities	Municipal Responsibilities
• Citizenship and Immigration Defence and Foreign Policy • Post Office • Money • Employment Insurance (EI) • Canada Pension Plan (CPP) • Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)	• Health and Education • Licenses • Highways • Prisons • Transportation • Parks • Tourism • Taxes	• Garbage and Recycling • Police and Fire Protection • Streets • Housing • Recreation • Public Library • Public Transit • Water and Sewer Taxes

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

Canada is a parliamentary democracy. Parliament has three parts: the Queen, the House of Commons, and the Senate.

The British Monarch is the Head of State

Currently, the Queen, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, is our Head of State. The Queen lives in the United Kingdom and is represented in Canada by the Governor General of Canada and the Lieutenant Governors of each province who perform royal duties on her behalf.

The Prime Minister is the Leader in Government

The Prime Minister is the leader of the political party with the most elected members of Parliament sitting in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister chooses Members of Parliament (MP) to give advice and help run the country. These people are called the Cabinet Ministers. They are all given special jobs and are responsible for certain areas. For example, the Minister of Finance takes care of the government's money.

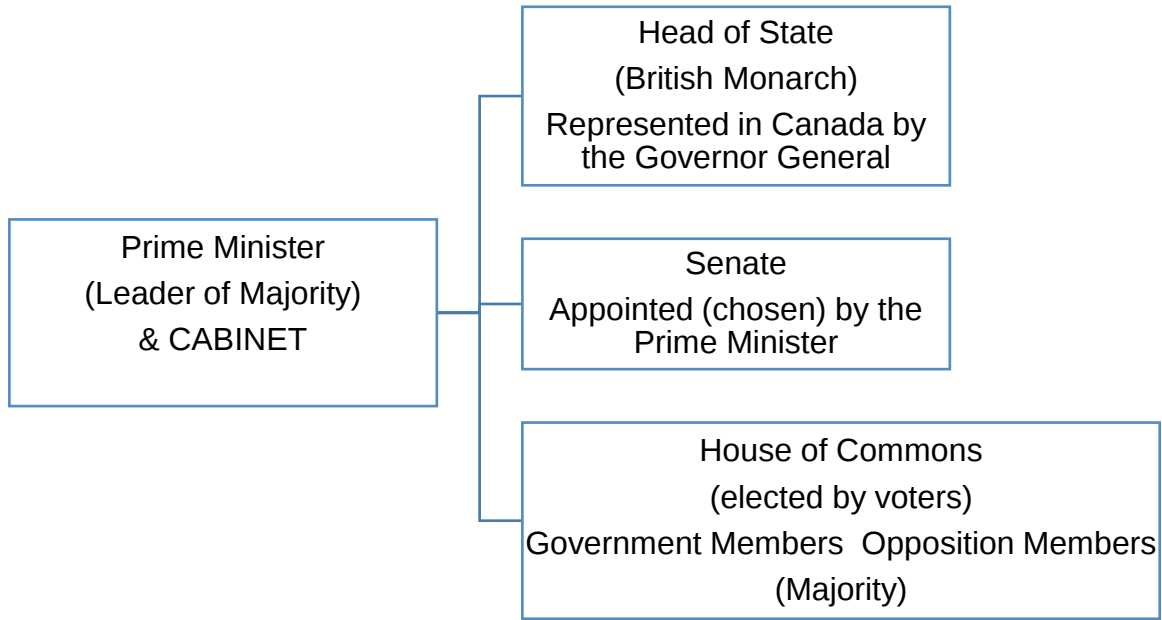
Members of Parliament

The people in the House of Commons are elected by the people of Canada, through elections and voting. They are called Members of Parliament (MP). An MP represents the people who elected him or her. Each MP usually belongs to a political party. After an election, the party that has the most MPs forms the government. The leader of that party then becomes the Prime Minister.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

The party with the second most MPs elected forms the Official Opposition. Their leader is the Leader of the Opposition. Members from other parties are also opposition members. The people in the Senate are chosen by the Prime Minister. They are called Senators.



To vote in a federal election, you must be:

- A Canadian citizen (temporary and permanent residents cannot vote);
- At least 18 years of age;
- A resident in the electoral district; and,
- Registered on the Voters List.

In a federal election you are voting for a Member of Parliament (MP), as well as the Prime Minister of Canada. However, you do not vote for the Prime Minister directly. When you vote for a candidate in a political party, you are also supporting the leader of that party.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

Table 3 Steps for Voting in a Federal Election

Steps for Voting in a Federal Election	Description
1. You Need a Voter Information Card	If your information is in the National Register of Electors, you will receive a voter information card. This tells you that your name is on the voters list and when and where to vote.
2. You Did Not Get a Voter Information Card	If you do not get a voter information card in the mail, call your local elections office to get on the voters list. To get this number, you can phone Elections Canada in Ottawa at 1-800 463-6868 or go to their website:
3. Advance Poll and Special Ballot	If you cannot vote on Election Day, you can vote at the advance polls or by special ballot. Dates and location for advance polls are on your voter information card.
4. On Election Day	You need to go to your local polling station to vote. The information is written on your voter information card. The poll officials at the polling station will confirm you are on the voters list by asking your name and address. You must bring identification with you to prove your identity. Then, you will be given a ballot.
5. Marking the Ballot	You will be asked to go behind a screen to mark your ballot. Mark an "X" in the circle next to the name of the candidate of your choice.
6. Voting is Secret	Your vote is a secret. Once you make your choice and mark the ballot, fold it and give it to the poll officials.
7. The Ballot Box	The poll official will tear off the counterfoil and hand you back the ballot for you to put in the ballot box.
8. The Election Results	When the voting is over, every ballot is counted, and the results are made public. You can see the results on television or on the Elections Canada website.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

Each province may be slightly different from the other, but the basic structure is shown in the chart below. Provincial governments are set up like the federal government except they have no Senate. The Lieutenant Governor represents the Crown (the Queen). Each province has a legislative assembly which is similar to the federal House of Commons.

The Members of the Legislative Assembly

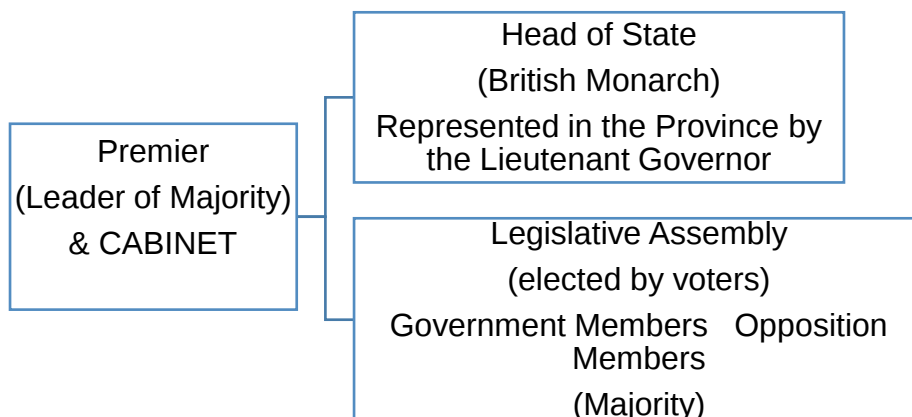
The Members of the Provincial Parliament (MPPs) are elected by the people in the province. Each MPP usually belongs to a political party. After an election, the leader of the party with the highest number of elected MPPs becomes the Premier of the province. The leader of the party with the second most votes becomes the Leader of the Opposition. The Premier of the province selects numerous Cabinet Ministers to look after provincial government departments.

MPPs represent all the people where they were elected, whether or not the people voted for him or her. MPPs listen to the problems, questions, ideas and opinions of the people who live in the electoral division they represent. In the Legislative Assembly, MPPs share the views of their constituents and debate and discuss concerns with other MPPs. They also deal with organizations and groups who advocate for concerns such as the environment, childcare, health care or education. The groups can meet with an MPP in person or write a letter.

To vote in an Ontario provincial election, you must be:

- A Canadian citizen;
- 18 years of age or older; and,
- A resident of Ontario.

In a provincial election, you are voting for a Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP), but your vote also helps choose the Premier of Ontario. You may only vote once in a provincial election. Your voting location for Election Day, advance poll voting and returning office are based on your address, which means you may vote only at the locations assigned to you.





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

London City Council

The London City Council is the governing body that represents the citizens of London. The Office of the Mayor represents the mayor of London. There is a citywide vote by all eligible voters to choose the mayor of London. The job of the mayor is to do the best thing for the whole city, while the city council exercises legislative powers.

In London, citizens vote for members of the London City Council every four years. Other municipalities may have elections every two or every four years.

To vote in a municipal election, you must be:

- A Canadian citizen;
- 18 years of age or older;
- A resident of the municipality where you plan to vote, or the owner or tenant of property in the municipality where you plan to vote, or the spouse of the owner or tenant who does not live elsewhere in the municipality; and,
- Not prohibited from voting under any law.
- You may only vote once in a municipal election. If you own or rent more than one property, you must vote where you live.
- If you are homeless, or do not have a permanent home or fixed address, you can still vote – you can vote in the area where you slept in the five weeks before the election.

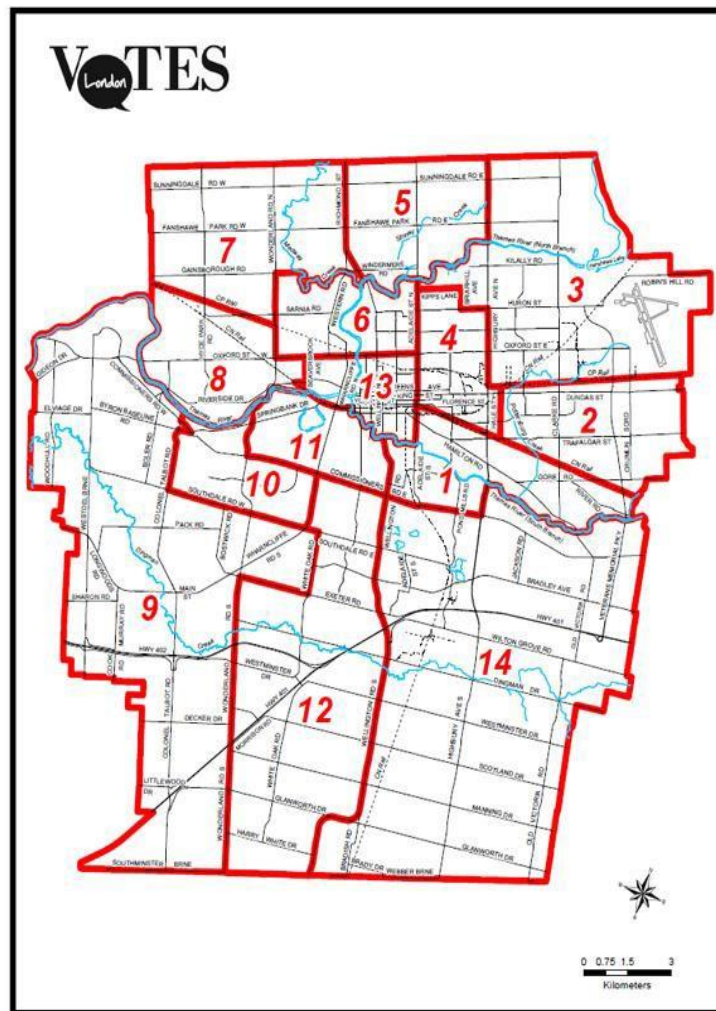
<http://settlement.org/ontario/immigration-citizenship/canadian-government/voting/a-guide-to-voting-in-your-municipal-election/#can>





CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

WARD MAP OF LONDON, ONTARIO



POLITICAL PARTIES

When people in Canada vote at federal or provincial level, they usually vote for a person who belongs to a political party, although there are also candidates who run as independents in an election. A political party is a group of people who share the same ideas about what the government should do, how the country should be run and what laws should be made. Each party will have a candidate to lead them. This person is someone the party believes will be a good public figure and a good leader. Some political parties have been around for a long time, but Canadians can create new political parties at any time.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

WHAT DO THE PARTIES DO

Members of political parties hold meetings to share their ideas and opinions. They make plans for what they would do if their candidates were elected to government.

Members of political parties also help to:

- Choose the party leader;
- Choose the party's candidates; and,
- Campaign for party candidates in elections.

Each party has a leader. The leader of the party with the largest number of elected members then becomes either the leader of Canada or of the province where the election was held.

In Canada, there are political parties at the federal and provincial levels. Each party has their own platform, and they promote these policies to the public to get people to join their party or vote for them in an election.

WHAT IS CAMPAIGNING

During an election, parties will campaign for your vote. This means that the candidate may come to your house to talk to you, appear on television, radio and the internet, hold meetings in community centres and put up signs and posters. This is how candidates explain their ideas and beliefs to the public. This is how you learn about what a party stands for. You can also read about all the parties that run for election on the internet.

THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

A political spectrum arranges political parties on a horizontal line from left to right. We use it to describe the range of political ideas of different parties and put parties into groups. In Canada, you can place the main political parties on this spectrum, going from left to centre to right. Generally, the ideas to the left are considered socialist, the ideas in the centre are considered liberal and the ideas to the right are considered conservative.

PROVINCIAL POLITICAL PARTIES

Several political parties exist within each province. In Ontario, there are currently 19 parties registered with Elections Ontario. You can learn about each of the provincial political parties or independent candidates by going to the [Elections Ontario](#) website.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

HAVING A PUBLIC VOICE



An important way to become more involved in your community is to voice your opinion on matters that interest you. There are a number of ways to express your views or concerns to people in power or decision-making positions in all three levels of government, in organizations or businesses, and in schools. Often, many governments, businesses and organizations have websites where you can comment on their products or services.

In general, there are five main ways through which you can effectively voice your opinions, views and concerns:

1. By writing a letter to a newspaper, magazine, television station, or your local Member of Parliament;
2. By phoning into a radio show or to a political party's department to discuss your views and/or concerns about a particular matter;
3. By emailing a business, organization, newspaper or magazine, or completing an online survey or form;
4. By attending local community or town hall meetings to discuss your views and/or concerns in person, or by making an appointment to meet someone in person to discuss these views and/or concerns; and/or,
5. By assembling peacefully through a public demonstration.

WRITING A LETTER OF COMPLAINT OR CONCERN

An effective way to become more involved in your community is to write to a business, organization or government official to make a complaint, discuss an issue that you want to see changed, or ask to have a problem fixed.

Writing to a Business or Organization

If you would like to write a letter or email to a business or organization to express a complaint or concern, it is important to focus on the facts and make your point clear and concise. The letter should be addressed to a person in a position in authority and who will understand your situation; often, this information can be obtained through the Internet (i.e. from the website of the business or organization), or by contacting the business or organization directly by telephone to access such information.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

Steps to writing an effective letter or email:

1. Write down every detail: who was involved? What is the issue with the product or service? When and where did the issue occur (include the time and place)? Were there any injuries? How much did you pay for the product or service?
2. Think about how you would like the problem to be fixed: Do you want to simply raise awareness of the problem or concern? Do you want an apology? Do you want a replacement product or your money back?
3. Write your letter clearly and focus on the facts. Give the person a date for responding to your letter before you decide to take further action to solve your concern or problem. End the letter by thanking the person for your time or attention.
4. Proofread your letter to ensure that all of the facts are laid out correctly and that the letter reads the way you intend it to.
5. If you decide to send your letter or email, make a copy for yourself before sending it.
6. If you do not get a response to your first letter or email, send a second letter or email to the same person and tell him/her that you have already written to them. If the problem is not fixed, then write a letter or email to a person who is higher up in the business or organization.

Writing to a Government Official

If you would like to write to a person who works in government, you could talk about a law you would like to see changed, taxes, immigration, health care, or something else that you think that government should address.

It is important that you are writing to a person in the level of government that is responsible for the issue you would like to see addressed. The Constitution of Canada divides the responsibilities of the government into provincial and federal jurisdictions. Additionally, the provincial government may delegate some of its responsibilities to one or more municipal governments.

For more detailed information regarding the responsibilities of the federal and provincial governments, please refer to Sections 91 and 92 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* by visiting <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-4.html>. Once you have determined the correct level of government to which to express your concern, keep in mind these key points:

1. Clearly state what the issue is;
2. Clearly say how and why you would like to see the law changed for this issue;
3. Ask for a reply;
4. Keep your letter short; and,
5. Thank the person for their time and attention.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

Writing a Letter of Opinion to a Newspaper or a Magazine

There are numerous reasons why you might write an opinion piece to a newspaper or magazine. You can write a letter either to comment on a recent news story that was covered by the newspaper, talk about an issue that you think is important, or respond to another person's opinion. If the editor of the newspaper accepts your letter, it will be printed in the paper.

Steps to writing an effective letter to a newspaper or magazine:

1. Follow the instructions. Most newspapers and magazines provide guidelines for writing a letter to the editor. These instructions are usually located in the first few pages of the newspaper or magazine.
2. Include your name, address, email address and phone number at the top of your letter. Editors need this information in order to prove your identity. If you do not want your name published, you can write this in your letter.
3. Clearly state why you are writing. If you are responding to an article or letter, name the article you are responding to in the first sentence of your letter.
4. Make sure to write your letter in a clear language and make your message simple, concise, and focused.
5. Proofread your letter to ensure that your letter is well written and grammatically sound.
6. Mail your letter, or email your letter if the publication allows it, so that the editor can copy and paste your letter into the newspaper or magazine.

SPEAK ABOUT A COMPLAINT OR CONCERN

If you are concerned that someone in your neighborhood or city is breaking a local bylaw within the city, you are entitled to make a complaint to your city. In London, there are various ways in which you can express these concerns:

- By phoning 519-661-4660
- By sending a fax to 519-963-5080
- By sending an email to enforcement@london.ca

Here are some points to remember when registering a complaint with the City of London, or any other municipality:

- You must give your name, address, phone number, and address of the property you want to complain about. The information is confidential, but you must identify yourself – anonymous complaints will not be accepted.
- You must describe your complaint briefly and concisely so that the staff can respond.
- A copy of your complaint will be given to a person (police officer) who visits the home or business you have complained about.
- The officer will discuss the complaint with the owner and try to solve the problem. If the problem is not resolved, people may be sent to fix the problem.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

LEAD YOUR COMMUNITY INTO ACTION

Go to a Public Forum about Concerns in Your City or Province

A public forum is a meeting to express your views, such as a town hall meeting. It is a chance for you to share what you are thinking about a particular issue and be a part of the decision-making process. Public meetings can happen at all levels of community or government. They can be held on many different topics. Learn what to expect at a community meeting by using the plan below before you attend.

1. Ask people about their experiences at community meetings or meetings with officials.
2. Think about the meeting you are going to attend:
 - a. What kind of meeting is it?
 - b. Who is organizing the meeting, and what do you expect to happen at the meeting?
 - c. What issue(s) is/are being discussed at this meeting?
 - d. What are the goals of this meeting – to discuss ideas or make a group decision?
 - e. How do you feel about going to the meeting?

Create Change in Your Community

As you become part of your community, you might notice some things you would like to see changed; for example, you may think that a local park needs cleaning or that street lights need to be brighter. If you want to create changes like these in your community, use these steps to work with a group to solve your problem.

1. Clearly state what you want to do and why this issue is important to you. If you need to do some research on the issue or find out who else this issue affects, do this before organizing a task force to solve the problem.
2. Figure out the tasks that need to be done, by what time, who will do them, and how they will do them.
3. Decide how you will solve the problem, and what kind of help you will need to get it done.
4. Brainstorm the solutions that could solve your problem.
5. Decide how you will share the information you learn with others in your community. There are numerous ways to do so; for example, you could use a poster, newsletter, website, workshop, or organize a public awareness campaign.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR IMMIGRANTS

Organize a Public Demonstration

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is a bill of fundamental rights and freedoms that are collectively entrenched in Sections 1-34 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. There are marked differences between a right and a freedom:

- A right is a common privilege given to all citizens of a country. For example, Section 6(1) of the *Charter* maintains that “Every citizen of Canada has the right to enter, remain in and leave Canada.” It is therefore the responsibility of the Government of Canada to ensure that both individual and group rights are honoured and not violated.
- A freedom, alternatively, is something with which the Government cannot interfere – it is the opposite of being constrained. For example, Section 2 of the *Charter* lists the fundamental freedoms to which citizens of Canada are entitled, such as the freedom of conscience and religion as noted in Section 2(a).

Under Section 2(c) of the *Charter*, the freedom of peaceful assembly is ensured. This particular section protects a person’s right to collect, in a peaceful manner, with other people to express ideas. This section thus enables you, as a Canadian citizen, to protest peacefully matters with which you may have an issue. Important to note is that this section does not protect breaches of the peace, such as riots.

Under Section 2(d) of the *Charter*, the freedom of association is ensured. This freedom is often used interchangeably with the freedom of peaceful assembly. It ensures that you may gather with other people to celebrate or demonstrate a particular cause, as long as it is lawful and peaceful. However, if any sections of the *Criminal Code* are violated, your group could be broken up and possibly arrested.

Organizing a public demonstration in a peaceful manner can be a very effective way to get your voice heard as a Canadian citizen. If there are many voices banding together to support a common cause, it is likely that media attention may be drawn toward the demonstration and the Government may be more obliged to take your cause seriously.





REFERENCES

- Cameron, J. & Derwing, T. Being Canadian: Language for Citizenship. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Regents Canada, 1996.
- Calgary Board of Education. [“Information for Volunteers in the Calgary Board of Education.”](#) (accessed on May 20, 2020).
- Calgary Board of Education. [“School Council Chair Roles and Responsibilities.”](#) (accessed on May 20, 2020).
- Elections Alberta. [“Registered Political Parties and Parties Eligible for Registration.”](#) (accessed on May 20, 2020).
- Elections Canada. [“Registered Political Parties and Parties Eligible for Registration.”](#) (accessed on May 20, 2020).
- Fleming, G. [“How to Write a Letter to the Editor.”](#) (accessed July 29, 2009).
- Government of Canada. [Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#). (accessed on May 20, 2020).
- John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights. [“Youth Guide to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”](#) (accessed May 20, 2020).
- Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada. A Look at Canada. Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006. Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. [“The Citizen’s Guide to the Alberta Legislature.”](#) 9th ed. (accessed May 20, 2020).
- City of Calgary. [“The City of Calgary Municipal Handbook City Organizational Chart.”](#) (accessed May 20, 2020).