

## Handout 1.1: Principles of Democracy

<p><b>Equality and Human Rights</b></p>	<p>All individuals are valued equally, have equal opportunities, and may not be discriminated against because of their race, religion, ethnicity, language, gender or sexual orientation. The human rights of all citizens are protected. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within their own country, and everyone has the right to leave and return to their own country.</li> <li>• Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.</li> <li>• Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.</li> <li>• Everyone has the right to organize and take part in peaceful meetings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Economic Freedom</b></p>	<p>The government allows some private ownership of property and businesses. People are allowed to choose their own work and join labour unions. It is generally accepted that free markets should exist in a democracy and the government should not totally control the economy.</p>
<p><b>Bill of Rights</b></p>	<p>A list of citizens' rights and freedoms. This document limits the power of government and explains the freedoms that are guaranteed to all people and protects people from a government that might abuse its powers. Canada's Bill of Rights, the <i>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms</i>, is entrenched in the Constitution of Canada and can be enforced by the courts.</p>
<p><b>The Rule of Law</b></p>	<p>All are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination. No one is above the law – this includes elected officials, the police and members of the military. Laws are equally, fairly and consistently enforced.</p>
<p><b>Control of the Abuse of Power</b></p>	<p>Corruption occurs when government officials use public funds for their own benefit or they exercise power in an illegal way. To protect against these abuses of power, democratic governments are often structured to limit the powers of government offices and those who work for them.</p>
<p><b>Free and Fair Elections</b></p>	<p>Elected officials are chosen by the people in a free and fair manner. Elections are held regularly, usually every few years. Most adult citizens have the right to vote and to run for office – regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity and level of wealth. There should be no obstacles to voting, and no intimidation, corruption, or threats to citizens before or during an election.</p>

<p><b>Multi-Party Systems</b></p>	<p>More than one political party participates in elections and plays a role in government. Multiple-party systems provide the government with different viewpoints on issues and provide voters with a choice of candidates, parties and policies. Countries with only one party are usually dictatorships.</p>
<p><b>Citizen Participation</b></p>	<p>Citizen participation in government is more than just a right – it is a responsibility. Participation can take the form of running for office, voting in elections, becoming an informed citizen, debating issues, attending community meetings, paying taxes, serving on a jury and protesting. Citizen participation builds a stronger democracy.</p>
<p><b>Accountability and Transparency</b></p>	<p>Elected and appointed officials are responsible for their actions and are accountable to the people. Officials must make decisions and perform their duties according to the will and wishes of those they represent, not for themselves. For government to be accountable, the people must be aware of the actions their government is taking. A transparent government holds public meetings and allows citizens to attend. The press and people are kept informed regarding the decisions being made.</p>
<p><b>Independent Judiciary</b></p>	<p>Courts and the judicial system are impartial. Judges and the judiciary branch are free to act without influence or control from the executive and legislative branches of government. They should also not be corrupt or influenced by other individuals, businesses or political groups.</p>
<p><b>Political Tolerance</b></p>	<p>Democratic societies are politically tolerant, and the rights of minorities and other groups are protected. Those who are not in power must be allowed to organize and share their opinions. A democratic society is comprised of people with different cultural backgrounds, who practice different religions, represent different races, are of different genders and have different sexually oriented identities. These, and people who belong to different socio-economic and ethnic groups all hold unique and valued political views.</p>
<p><b>Accepting the Results of Elections</b></p>	<p>Free and fair elections have both winners and losers. The losers and their supporters must accept that they have lost an election. Democracy depends on the peaceful transfer of power from one party to the next.</p>

Adapted from: *Deliberating in a Democracy in the Americas* (2011). Originally excerpted and adapted from *Democracy for All* (Street Law, Inc. 1994).