

Lesson 6

Local Government Elections



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How is my local government elected?
- 2 How can I learn about the election candidates?
- 3 Which candidate(s) do I support and why?

SUMMARY

Elections present an opportunity for citizens to discuss and debate political issues and have a voice about the future direction of their community.

In this lesson, students will become acquainted with the local government election process and analyze ways to compare the candidates. In groups, students will collect information about or from one of the candidates and share their findings with the rest of the class. In the *Consolidation* activity, students will reflect on which issues are most important to them and which candidate(s) they will vote for, and why.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- analyze issues facing the community;
- explain details about the local government election process in their community;
- analyze different ways to compare the candidates;
- research the candidates running for election using primary and secondary resources;
- evaluate which candidate(s) they support and why.

Starter

1. Share the following with students.

In any given place – a neighbourhood, community, province or country – anywhere that groups of people live together and where the laws of the land affect everyone in a similar way, there will be differences in opinions about how government and society should work, which issues are most important and how best to take action. Giving citizens an opportunity to have a voice in the debate is fundamental to a democracy.

2. In small groups, have students brainstorm some of the most pressing issues in your community.
3. As a class, co-create criteria to evaluate the list of community issues. Sample criteria: Ask students to respond to the following questions for each issue – Definitely / Probably / Probably not / Definitely not
 - Is the impact long lasting?
 - Is the impact extreme – positively or negatively?
 - Are many people affected?
 - Does it directly affect you, your family and friends?
 - Are many people for and/or against it?
 - Are the differences between supporters and opponents substantial?
4. Return to small groups and have students rank the issues from the earlier discussion using the criteria established.
5. Follow up with a class discussion to review the small group rankings and as a class come to a consensus on the top three issues facing the community.

Activities

1. Review the local election process in New Brunswick using the following guiding questions and Slide Deck 6. Add specific information about the election races in your community.
 - What is the purpose of elections?
 - Who is responsible for running the local elections?
 - What is an electoral system or voting system?
 - How does First-Past-the-Post work?
 - How many candidates can I vote for in each race?

2. Find out which candidates are running for election for which positions in your community. Show students where they can find this information by visiting your local government's website.

3. On a blackboard or whiteboard, write down the following question: How do voters decide who to vote for?

Through a class discussion, generate questions to frame this decision. For example:

- Why do they want to be on council?
 - Who would make a good leader for the community?
 - Who would work well with the rest of council to make decisions for our local government?
 - What experience does the candidate have in serving the community?
 - What are the most important issues in the community? Do they matter to candidates? Do they have ideas to address these issues?
 - What ideas or goals do the candidates have for our local government? Which do I support the most?
4. Divide the class into pairs or small groups to research the candidates running for election (Activity 6.1). As a class, develop a checklist for the candidate profiles. Have students choose how the information will be presented (e.g., poster, slide deck, video, mock Facebook or Instagram profile).

Sample candidate profile:

- Name and photo
- Personal information (What skills or experience do they have for the job?)
- Reason for running (Why do they want the job?)
- Priorities (What issues are most important to the candidate?)
- Issues (What is their position or proposed ideas for the three election issues?)

TEACHER NOTE

Encourage students to use primary and secondary resources, including news articles and commentary, candidate websites and social media, or even contact the candidates directly.

5. Have each group present their candidate profile and research to the rest of the class. Alternatively, you can post the group work on a digital platform and allow students to review each profile.

Consolidation

Have a brief closing discussion about the candidates running for election, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions.

- Which candidate did you find most appealing on a personal level and why?
- Which candidate aligns with your views? Which candidate do you think will best address the issues that matter most to you? Explain your reasoning.
- Which candidate will you support and why?
- What do you think has shaped your political views the most? Why is it important to respect others' viewpoints even if they differ from your own?

SUPPORTS AND ADAPTATIONS

Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with terms and definitions in advance.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the diversity of the candidates running in your community and discuss the need for diversity in politics. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fredericton group aims to get more women running in municipal elections this spring: www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/fredericton-women-municipal-1.5853705 - Women in Politics: https://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/women-politics/ - MP Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: https://globalnews.ca/news/6071654/mumilaaq-qaqqaq-nunavut-mp/ - Refugees in Politics: https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/11/04/maryam-monsef_n_8468048.html
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If working in pairs or small groups in the classroom is not possible, consider using Google Docs for collaborative activities and discussion. • Consider using a digital format for the candidate research and profile so that it can be shared online, in order to limit interactions or movement in the classroom.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Local government councils are made up of elected officials. They are comprised of a head of council called a **mayor** and several **councillors**, collectively called **council members**. Local government councils make decisions together to meet your community's needs now and in the future.

Local government elections in New Brunswick must be held every four years, on the on the second Monday in May. Although local government elections were scheduled to take place in May 2020, the provincial government passed legislation to postpone elections due to COVID-19. The next local government elections will be held on Monday, May 10, 2021.

A **voting system** (or electoral system) is the way in which we elect our representatives. The voting system includes set rules for how preferences are recorded and the method used for determining which candidate wins. There are many different voting systems used around the world.

New Brunswick uses a system called **First Past-The-Post** (FPTP). A successful candidate must receive the most votes in order to be elected.

In order to be eligible to vote in the local government elections in New Brunswick you must:

- Be a Canadian citizen;
- Be eighteen years of age on or before polling day;
- Have been or will have been ordinarily resident in the Province for a period of at least 40 days immediately before the election; and
- Be living in the local government area, school district, or health region on Election Day.

Depending on where you live, you may be able to vote for mayor (head of a local government council) and councillor (one or more members of your local government council). You may also be able to vote for representatives for your district education council or regional health authority.

Mayors are elected **at-large** (by all eligible voters in the community). Councillors can be elected at-large or by a **district** or **ward system**, where the local government is broken down into smaller geographic areas with their own designated councillor(s). Some local governments use a mix of district and at-large systems.

In local government elections in New Brunswick, there are two types of elections: **single-member elections** and **multi-member elections**. In single-member elections, only one candidate is elected, such as in the case of a mayoral race or a council race where only one person is selected to represent one **district** (also known as a **ward**). Voters can only choose one candidate on the ballot and the candidate with the most votes wins. However, in multi-member elections, more than one member is elected so voters can choose more than one candidate if they choose (up to a maximum). For instance, if six councillors are elected at-large for the entire local government, then voters can select up to six candidates. The six candidates with the most votes are elected to council.

Voting in elections is done by secret ballot. This ensures the privacy of each voter's choice. No one except the voter knows the choice that was made.

A ballot lists the names of the candidates running for each position in your local government election. There is a space beside each candidate's name on the ballot. As long as you clearly mark the ballot for the appropriate number of candidates, your votes will be counted. This includes a checkmark, X, shading-in or another marking. Regarding the number of choices on a ballot, if six council members are elected at-large, you can vote for up to six candidates. Alternatively, if only one candidate is elected in a given race, you can only vote for one candidate.

A **rejected** vote is declared invalid by the deputy returning officer because it was not properly marked (e.g., the voter selected more than the allowed number of candidates). In the case of local government elections, one race or section may be declared valid and another may be deemed invalid.

A **spoiled** ballot is a ballot that is mistakenly marked or torn and exchanged for a new ballot. It is kept separate and never placed in the ballot box.

Across all local governments, there may be two, three, four or more candidates running for a position on council, depending on the race. A candidate is elected by **acclamation** if they have no opponents, or if the number of candidates match the number of council members to be elected. In that case, no vote is held for that race.

In order to run as a candidate in the local government election in New Brunswick, you must 18 years of age on or before Election Day; a Canadian citizen; a resident of the province and the local government area for at least 6 months immediately preceding election day; and in a local government that is divided into wards for election purposes, a candidate for ward councillor must be a resident of that ward when they are nominated.

There are many ways to gather information about the local government election candidates. Community groups hold in-person or virtual town hall meetings or all-candidate debates where citizens are invited to listen to candidates speak on the issues and ask questions. Information can also be found on radio and television, media websites or in newspapers and local magazines. Individuals may also visit campaign offices, attend campaign events or have a chance to talk to candidates when they visit homes during door to door canvassing, when possible. Information may also be accessible online through candidate websites and social media pages. This is one of the first elections in Canada to happen during the COVID-19 pandemic, so you can expect to see a much greater focus on virtual outreach compared to traditional methods.