

2026 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

10:30 AM



# SCRUTINEER'S GUIDE

TO GENERAL LOCAL ELECTIONS IN B.C.

2026



# Getting Started

This brochure answers questions and provides best practices about scrutineers and their role in general local elections in British Columbia.

Scrutineers are also known as "*candidate representatives*" in provincial legislation.

General local elections in B.C. are held every four years on the third Saturday in October. The next general local elections will be held on **Saturday, October 17, 2026**.

Through general local elections residents and non-resident property electors determine the individuals who will collectively govern and make decisions on their behalf. Electors do this by voting – casting their ballots in favour of one or more candidate(s).

General local elections (and any by-elections held to fill vacancies between general local elections) must be run in accordance with the *Local Government Act*, the *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act*, the *Community Charter*, the *Vancouver Charter* (in the City of Vancouver), the *School Act*, the *Offence Act* and the local government's or board of education's election bylaw, as applicable.

The local government's election bylaw enables the local government to make decisions about some aspects of local elections administration (e.g., use of voting machines).

Unlike provincial elections, local elections are not managed by one organization. Each local government is responsible for running its own local elections, including voting, counting, reporting results, and accepting candidate nominations. [Elections BC](#) is responsible for administering the campaign financing and election advertising rules in the *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act*.

Responsibility for school trustee elections is determined in accordance with the *School Act*. Further information about school trustee elections can be found on the [Ministry of Education and Child Care website](#).

Local governments appoint a Chief Election Officer to run local elections. Chief Election Officers are responsible for overseeing all election administration, including: receiving nomination documents; declaring candidates; administering voting opportunities; counting ballots; and, declaring election results.

Chief Election Officers also work with Elections BC to monitor compliance with election advertising regulations and may assist Elections BC to address incidents of election advertising non-compliance.

### **Chief Election Officer**

The Chief Election Officer may be a senior local government employee, such as a corporate officer, or a private contractor hired to conduct the election on the local government's behalf.

The Presiding Election Official is appointed by the Chief Election Officer to conduct the election at a voting place.

# Being a Scrutineer

## Why consider being a scrutineer?

Volunteering to be a scrutineer is one way to be involved in local elections. Scrutineers play a role in helping protect the integrity of the voting process for their community and the candidate they represent.

## What is the role of a scrutineer?

Scrutineers represent candidates at advance, special and general voting opportunities to:

- observe the opening of the mail ballots, if applicable;
- observe the voting procedures; and,
- scrutinize the ballot-counting process after the close of voting at the end of general voting day.

Scrutineers must follow the legislation, the local government's election bylaw and the direction of the Chief Election Officer and Presiding Election Official at the voting place during voting proceedings and the ballot counting process.

## Who can be a scrutineer?

Candidates can choose whom to appoint as a scrutineer. For example, a candidate may appoint a relative or friend to scrutineer for them during local elections. A candidate's official agent may also act as a scrutineer on voting day.

## What is an Official Agent?

The official agent may act as the campaign manager or spokesperson or be the point of contact for the people helping on the candidate's election campaign.

A candidate may appoint an official agent to represent them during the election process.

## How are scrutineers appointed?

Candidates or their official agent may appoint a scrutineer. Scrutineer appointments must be made in writing (including the name and address of the person) and delivered to the Chief Election Officer as soon as practicable after the appointment has been made.

There is no set period in the legislation within which a candidate or their official agent must appoint a scrutineer. However, the Chief Election Officer may establish a deadline for scrutineers to be appointed by to simplify election administration.



A person interested in being a scrutineer can contact a candidate or the Chief Election Officer for more information about the local government's process and to better understand what their time commitment would be during the election.

### **The *Local Government Act* and Scrutineers**

Provincial legislation requires that each scrutineer appointment must:

- be written and signed by the person making the appointment (e.g. candidate or official agent);
- include the full name and address of the person appointed; and,
- be submitted to the Chief Election Officer as soon as practicable after the appointment is made.

The appointment of a scrutineer may only be cancelled in the same manner as the appointment was made.

## **Number of scrutineers at a voting place**

Each candidate or their official agent may appoint one scrutineer for each ballot box used at a voting place during general local elections.

In some cases, the local government's election bylaw may allow a candidate to have more than one scrutineer for each ballot box used at a voting place. The absence of a scrutineer at the voting place does not invalidate a local election.

## Special Voting Opportunities

Special voting opportunities are generally held in hospitals, long-term care facilities or other places where an elector's mobility may be impaired. Scrutineers for special voting opportunities are chosen by agreement of the candidates or failing agreement by the candidates, by the Chief Election Officer.

A local government's election bylaw may limit, or authorize the Chief Election Officer to limit, the number of scrutineers at special voting opportunities.

## Preparing to scrutineer

There are several actions scrutineers can take to prepare for their role. Scrutineers can:

- ensure their availability for training sessions (if applicable) and voting opportunities;
- consider the length of time they are available to observe the voting or ballot counting process;
- take the required solemn declaration to preserve the secrecy of the vote (usually made at the local government office);
- clarify any questions they may have with the Chief Election Officer prior to scrutineering at a voting opportunity;
- review the local government's election bylaw and local government guidelines for scrutineers (if any); and,
- understand the role of the Presiding Election Official at the voting place.

# Voting Opportunities

## On voting day

Local governments, by bylaw, and the Chief Election Officer have the authority to establish specific rules governing scrutineer conduct and responsibilities. Scrutineers must follow these rules, or they may be ordered to leave the voting place by the Chief Election Officer, Presiding Election Official or local law enforcement.

While scrutineers are appointed to represent candidates at a voting opportunity, they are not there to campaign for the candidates. They are there to neutrally observe the voting process. Scrutineers are not permitted to wear anything that shows support for a particular candidate (e.g., shirt, hat, button) while they are in or near the voting place.

Scrutineers may work part of the voting day and then be replaced by another appointed scrutineer. The Chief Election Officer may place requirements around the timing of shifts to minimize disruption at the voting place and/or require that scrutineers only serve one shift during voting.

Scrutineers may be asked to inform the Presiding Election Official if they leave the voting place and/or are being replaced by a new scrutineer.

At the voting place **scrutineers must:**

- carry a copy of their appointment documents and, before beginning duties at the voting place, show them to the Presiding Election Official;

- make the required declaration to preserve the secrecy of the vote (if not previously completed);
- follow the direction of the Presiding Election Official; and,
- remain in the designated area for scrutineers to observe the vote, if one has been designated.

### **Challenging an Elector's Eligibility to Receive a Ballot**

A scrutineer may challenge an elector's right to receive a ballot based on their belief that the elector is not entitled to vote or has accepted an inducement to vote. Challenges must be raised before the ballot is issued to the elector.

The Presiding Election Official will discuss the matter with the elector and decide whether or not the elector is eligible. The Presiding Election Official must keep a record indicating the elector was challenged and record the name of the scrutineer who made the challenge.

During voting **scrutineers may:**

- generally, only communicate with election officials during times when no electors are present at the voting place – unless they are challenging an elector's eligibility to receive a ballot;
- ask to look at the voting books and write down the names of people who have voted, provided it does not interfere with the voting process;
- be asked to witness the sealing of a ballot box by the Presiding Election Official;

- add their initials during the sealing of a ballot box; or,
- privately communicate with the candidate or official agent provided it is outside the voting place and not in the presence of electors or election officials.

During voting **scrutineers must not:**

- interfere with the duties of the Presiding Election Official or handle election documents;
- handle or touch the voting books, or make a copy (such as taking a photo or asking for a photocopy);
- view, interfere with, or assist a person marking a ballot;
- attempt to discover how someone voted or marked their ballot;
- communicate information about how someone voted;
- canvass or solicit votes or otherwise attempt to influence an elector's vote;
- display, distribute, post or openly leave a representation of a ballot marked for a particular result in the voting place or elsewhere;
- display, distribute, or post any election advertising within 100 metres of a voting place on voting day that identifies a candidate or elector organization;
- carry, wear or supply a flag, badge or other item indicating support for a candidate, elector organization; or,
- make telephone calls or take photos inside the voting place.

## Mail Ballot Voting

Local governments that offer mail ballot voting may have a separate process for opening external envelopes and checking elector registration documents prior to the ballot count. Candidates are entitled to have a representative present during this process.

Conflict between scrutineers or with other persons present at the voting place can raise concerns about the procedures and safety at a voting place. If conflict does arise, due to a concern about procedures or otherwise, this should be brought to the attention of the Presiding Election Official to address in a manner that does not disturb voting.

The Presiding Election Official has authority to order a person to leave if they are disturbing the peace and order of proceedings.



# After the Close of Voting

## Observing the ballot count

Ballot counting begins after voting places close at 8:00 p.m. local time and is generally conducted at the voting place where the ballot boxes are located unless the Chief Election Officer has directed that the counting is to take place at another location.

### Acceptance or Rejection of a Ballot

Ballots must be accepted if the elector's intent is clear. Ballots must be rejected if:

- the ballot is physically different from the ballots provided;
- there are no marks on the ballot;
- the ballot is uniquely marked such that an elector could be identified; or,
- the ballot has more marks than the number of candidates to be elected.

Scrutineers must be in the voting place before the end of voting to observe the ballot count and must not leave the voting place until after the count is complete.

Only one candidate representative (scrutineer or official agent) for each candidate may be present to observe the count at each location where ballot counting takes place, unless another representative is also permitted by the Presiding Election Official.

Candidates are entitled to be present during the ballot count as well. The Presiding Election Official may explain the ballot counting process and outline what scrutineers may and may not do while the count is being conducted prior to starting the ballot count.

### **Use of Voting Machines**

Local governments may establish different: procedures for how to vote, the form of ballot, and, requirements for counting of votes for voting machines.

During the ballot count **scrutineers must:**

- be able to see how the ballot is marked as it is being considered for acceptance by the Presiding Election Official or other election officials under the supervision of the Presiding Election Official;
- raise their objection (if they have one) to a ballot's acceptance or rejection with the Presiding Election Official at the time the ballot is being considered;
- not participate in the physical counting of the ballots;
- not touch the ballot boxes or the ballots during the counting process; and,
- not leave during the ballot counting process.

At the ballot count **scrutineers may:**

- be asked to witness the opening of the ballot box(es) for counting;
- be asked to witness the opening of the certification envelopes for mail ballots

either at the ballot count or at another designated time; and/or,

- look at the ballot packages after the count to make sure they are properly re-sealed and may add their own seal to the ballot package.

## **Objections to the Acceptance or Rejection of a Ballot**

The Presiding Election Official must record an objection to accept or reject a ballot made by a candidate or scrutineer.

Objections to the Presiding Election Official's decision relative to the ballot in question are recorded and submitted with the ballot account for that voting place to the Chief Election Officer. The Presiding Election Official's decision to accept or reject a ballot can only be overturned by the Chief Election Officer or by the Provincial Court following a judicial recount.

## **Judicial recounts**

Scrutineers may make an application to the Courts for a judicial recount.

An application for judicial recount may only be made in the time between the declaration of the official election results and nine days after the close of general voting.

An application for judicial recount can only be made on the basis that the:

- ballots were incorrectly accepted or rejected;

- ballot account does not accurately record the number of valid votes for a candidate; or,
- final determination of results did not correctly calculate the total number of valid votes for a candidate.

## **Local guidelines for scrutineers**

Some local governments and Chief Election Officers have developed guidelines for scrutineers to assist with election day administration and to clarify scrutineer roles and responsibilities on voting day and at the ballot count.

These guidelines assist the Chief Election Officer and Presiding Election Official to manage scrutineers during voting and help the voting proceedings and the ballot counting process to run smoothly.

Local government best practices for scrutineers may:

- require that the solemn declaration to preserve the secrecy of the vote be made prior to voting day to help ease voting day administration;
- outline whether a scrutineer may be replaced by another scrutineer during voting, return for a second shift or when scrutineer shift changes may occur;
- require scrutineers to wear a name tag at the voting place to identify them as a scrutineer;
- state whether a scrutineer may be asked by the Presiding Election Official to witness ballot box inspection prior to voting (the

final decision of who the witness will be is made by the Presiding Election Official);

- clarify when it is appropriate for scrutineers to ask to view the voting books and record the names of those elector that have voted (usually when the voting place is quiet and providing it does not interfere with voting proceedings);
- outline that scrutineers may give the candidate's official agent the record of electors who have voted;
- require scrutineers to keep questions to election staff to a minimum unless it is vital to the integrity of the election process;
- recommend scrutineers provide their own food, beverages, folding chair and blanket or coats at the voting place and to clean up their area at the close of voting;
- state whether the use of electronic devices is permitted in the voting place;
- require scrutineers to keep activities quiet and to a minimum while observing the vote;
- require that scrutineers refrain from visiting with each other unless outside the voting place;
- state that scrutineers must not discuss the election with electors, election staff or other scrutineers inside or outside the voting place;
- include specific rules for scrutineers if voting machines are used instead of manual counting procedures; and,
- include specific roles for scrutineers with respect to mail ballot voting if mail ballot voting is provided for in the local government's election bylaw.

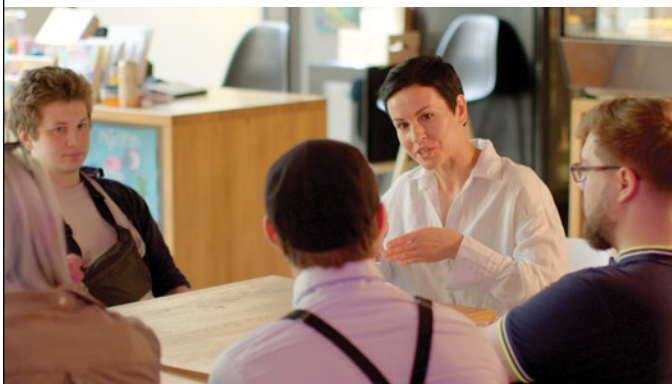
## Scrutineers for Assent Voting

There are specific rules set out for a scrutineer during assent voting (formerly referendum) that are different than for an election. For example, a person who wishes to volunteer as a scrutineer either in favour or against the assent voting question must submit an application directly to the Chief Election Officer in order to be appointed as a scrutineer.

The application to be a scrutineer must be signed by the applicant and contain:

- the applicant's full name, address and phone number (if required by the Chief Election Officer);
- a statement that they are entitled to vote as an elector and to act as scrutineer in the assent voting; and,
- a statement as to whether they are in favour or opposed to the question.

For more information about rules for scrutineers during assent voting refer to the [\*Assent Voting: Processes & Considerations for Local Governments in British Columbia\*](#)



# Further Information

Local government mailing addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses and websites are available online from CivicInfo BC at: [www.civicinfo.bc.ca/directories](http://www.civicinfo.bc.ca/directories)

For answers to legislative **questions about municipal and regional district elections** please contact:

**Ministry of Housing and  
Municipal Affairs**

Governance and Structure Branch

Phone: 250 387-4020

Email: [LGgovernance@gov.bc.ca](mailto:LGgovernance@gov.bc.ca)

Website: [www.gov.bc.ca/localelections](http://www.gov.bc.ca/localelections)

For answers to **questions about elector organization registration, election advertising, third party sponsors or campaign financing disclosure** please contact:

**Elections BC**

Phone: 250 387-5305

Toll-free: 1 800 661-8683 /

TTY 1 888 456-5448

Email: [electoral.finance@elections.bc.ca](mailto:electoral.finance@elections.bc.ca)

Website: [https://elections.bc.ca/  
localelections/2026-general-local-elections/](https://elections.bc.ca/localelections/2026-general-local-elections/)

## Disclaimer

In the event that there is inconsistency between this booklet and the *Local Government Act*, the *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act*, or any other Act, the legislation shall prevail.

## **Land Acknowledgment**

The BC Public Service acknowledges the territories of First Nations around B.C. and is grateful to carry out its work on these lands – it acknowledges the rights, interests, priorities, and concerns of all Indigenous Peoples – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit – respecting and acknowledging their distinct cultures, histories, rights, laws, and governments.

