



# Summary report of the Elections Canada TeleTownHall

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Prepared by The Canadian accessible elections TeleTownHall organizing committee

### Important note:

This report has been generated based on an audio recording that will not be shared with any external organizations or individuals. In addition, and in order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality, the names of those participants who asked questions and made comments and suggestions will not be identified in this report. To contact the Committee write to [CAET2019@Gmail.com](mailto:CAET2019@Gmail.com).

## Introduction

This TeleTownHall was held countrywide and was hosted by the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) and Sterling Creations in collaboration with Elections Canada.

* The main speaker for Elections Canada was Susan Torosian.
* Technical support was provided by Albert Ruel of the CCB.
* Moderator services was provided by Donna Jodhan of Sterling Creations.
* The face to face hosting of participants in Ottawa was provided by Kim Kilpatrick and Shelly Morris of the CCB.
* The TeleTownHall commenced shortly after 6 pm Eastern and ended shortly after 8:15 pm Eastern. There were approximately 92 registrants and our estimates reveal that there were about 62 participants not including those who were brought in by others.
* The meeting began with the moderator reiterating the rules of engagement and introducing the main speaker.
* The main speaker then gave an outline of some of the services that Elections Canada is planning to offer to blind, deaf/blind, and vision impaired electors for the upcoming Federal Elections to be held on October 21 2019.
* The technical support person gave some final instructions and then the main session of the meeting commenced.

# Outline from Susan Torosian

Sue highlighted the following points in her introduction.

* The recognition of diverse needs.
* Accessibility could mean different things to different people based on various requirements.
* The long term approach by Elections Canada is to have a universal design approach in terms of providing and designing their services. The objective would be to provide flexibility
* Elections Canada has come a long way but it recognizes that there is still a lot of work to be done.
* In 2015 Elections Canada conducted an extensive review of all of its polling stations across Canada which totalled about 27,000 and the emphasis was placed on accessibility.
* A criteria of 35 check lists were developed in collaboration with the community along with returning officers.
* 15 of these 35 check lists were mandatory and a 98% accessibility compliance was achieved.
* This process has been repeated for this upcoming Federal Election.
* Tools have also been made available at the polling stations for persons with varying disabilities.
* On Election Day, Braille lists of candidates are to be made available along with Braille templates.
* Lit magnifiers with four times magnification, signature guides, and an easy to grip pencil for easier use are just some of the tools being made available.
* Options would include sign language interpretation to be requested by the Tuesday before the actual date of the election (October 21), and to bring along a helper if required.
* For the previous and upcoming Election, voters with a disability would be asked to identify their needs when they arrive at the polling station.
* The emphasis for poll workers would be not to assume the needs of any voter but instead, to listen and to react to the need of the voter.

# Summary of points from participants

## TeleTownHall Organizing Committee Member Observations:

Based on the questions asked by participants during the meeting and feedback received by the Committee it appears the major concerns for Canadians who are blind, deaf-blind and low vision are as follows:

* Appreciation for the improved accessibility of the Elections Canada Website;
* Lack of accessible electronic/online voting;
* Lack of accessible voter info generally, and lack of accessible candidate lists at Advance Polls;
* Insufficient access to polling stations – access by transit, physical facility layout and low vision signage.

The following is a high level list of points raised by participants. A more in depth break down of queries, comments, questions and feedback and responses from Elections Canada follows this.

## List of highlights

* Participants were most concerned about not being able to vote independently and to vote online.
* They were concerned that there were no assistive voting machines available for use at this Federal Election.
* They wanted to know how soon would or could these voting machines be made available given that they were already being used at the Provincial and Municipal levels.
* They expressed the hope that they would be available by the time of the first by election following the forthcoming Federal Election.
* They raised concerns about not being able to have Braille lists of candidates at the advanced polls.
* They suggested that Elections Canada make better use of resources in the Provinces to provide Braille lists of candidates on a timely basis for advanced polls.
* They sought clarification on the availability of alternate formats for voter information.
* They wanted to know if there could be easy to grip pencils that made raised marks when used to mark ballots.
* They raised concerns over appropriate signage for polling stations and appropriate access to polling stations via public transit.
* They wanted to know how one could become a tester for the testing of accessible devices for use at polling stations when voting.
* They sought clarification that oaths for helpers would be available at all polling stations across the country in both official languages.
* They sought clarification with regard to ages and citizenship of helpers.

## Important note

* Elections Canada will be providing clarification to participants on the ability of easy to grip pencils to leave raised marks when a voter marks their ballot and they will relay the message back to head office that participants are extremely anxious to see the implementation of assistive voting machines.

## Queries and responses

### Main queries asked by participants will be followed by feedback from Elections Canada

### From participant – (inaccessible formats)

* Was pleased with improvements made to Elections Canada’s website.
* Not enough access to information mailed to voters. That is not enough materials in accessible formats.
* Formats have not lived up to full accessibility; bigger, bolder, brighter, cleaner, clearer, and more contrast for persons with low vision.
* More information required as to how to obtain materials in alternate formats.
* Pleased with continuing improvements to ballot boxes.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (improvements to info and website)

There have been checks implemented for plain language, visual requirements, contrast, and improvements to ballots to make them larger visually. Fonts have been made larger and contrast has been improved.

* Voter information guides are sent to all households and they contain information for those with accessibility needs.
* The Elections Canada Advisory Group on Disability Issues (AGDI) has also participated in product development and there has been a demonstration day activity as well.
* Demonstration day consisted of various groups reviewing various products and services and providing feedback.
* The Elections Canada website will be changed for the 2019 Federal Election and it will be more user friendly.
* More improvements are planned for the voter information card to make it less cluttered and to have fonts be clearer.

### From participant – (about knowledge of ASL)

* Question asked as to whether volunteers are aware of and can work with American sign language?

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (recruitment requirements)

* There is a recruitment profile on the front page of the website. This would include for both advanced and voting day polls.
* Recruitment officers are asked to recruit from the communities that they are serving.
* Skills would include minority languages and ASL skills.
* The question on ASL skills may not be specifically asked but it is a good point.
* It may be a bit late to include this question in the application process but there are questions asked about unique disability or accessibility skills in the application form that are being brought to the table by the applicant.
* There are opportunities to flag this type of skill/need in the online application process.

### From participant – (moving away from paper ballots)

* Recognizes that due to legislation, changes to ballots and the balloting process cannot be easily made by Elections Canada.
* There needs to be a movement away from the current paper ballots and templates.
* The actual process of marking one’s ballot in the right spot seems to be the most problematic and one that legislation does not seem to address.
* A request for this to be addressed. Casting a ballot still creates significant barriers for those who for various reasons may not be able to place their mark and verify that they have done so according to their wishes.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (electronic devices and digital ID)

* Voters are allowed to bring in their own electronic devices for example an AI or computer-assisted reader.
* Electronic voting has been explored starting with the previous election and continues to be studied but there is a challenge with regard to voter authentication with regard as to who is on the other end of the line or the computer from which the ballot is being cast.
* In Canada there is no digital identity and the Government may move to introduce as is presently done in Estonia where there is a digital identification for every voter.
* This would help with electronic voting however, there are many concerns around security for electronic voting in the present environment. There are concerns over cyber-attacks.
* Security standards presently in place are extremely high and significant investment has been made in the infrastructure to prevent hacking and security for online registration is also very high.

### From participant – (agreement on security, braille templates)

* Agrees with Elections Canada’s security mechanisms.
* Will the Braille template be an option at all polling stations?

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (availability of Braille templates) \* Both Braille templates and a Braille list of candidates will be available at polling stations on Elections Day. However, the Braille lists of candidates will not be available at advanced polls nor in local offices.

* Reason for this is because of the time delay between when confirmation of the candidates are received which is 18 days before Elections Day.
* In response to options available at advanced polls; the voter would need to determine when it is best to vote (e.g. at advanced polls or on Elections Day).
* Other options would include visiting any one of the 500 local offices across the country when the Election is called and vote by special ballot.
* A special ballot would however require one to write in the candidate’s name which in some cases would be a challenge.

### From participant – (availability of voting machines)

* Will there be voting machines at this Federal Election? These are free standing machines. They use a paper ballot and they allow voters to have audible confirmation of who they voted for.
* Also at the advanced polls, will the voter template be there and please clarify that the Braille list of candidates will not be available.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (Braille templates & voting machines)

* The voter template will be there but the Braille list of candidates will not be there.
* The participant suggests that it does not take all that long to produce Braille lists of candidates and that these lists should be there for at least during the second week of the advanced polls.
* Elections Canada comments that with 26 million voters across the country and with 27 thousand polling stations across the country; lists are processed regionally and there are not enough printers across the country to handle the volume of lists to be printed given the quality assurance control that needs to be in place.
* A pilot of stand alone voting machines was done in 2008 but it was not very successful.
* There is now in place through legislation a mandate to explore the alternative for voting via stand alone machines but it will not be done for this coming Election.
* The participant laments the lack of voter ability to vote in secret and to verify. Taking a helper is not the way to go.
* Elections Canada agrees.

### From participant – (voting machines, legislation)

* Not prepared to wait for voting options for ever. There are already alternate voting options in use in certain jurisdictions across the country.
* Some use machines. Others use the phone. Others use the Internet. In some places there is no use of the paper ballot.
* Under legislation Elections Canada now has the option to test all three systems.
* Question: When will this testing commence and what priority is it being given?

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (now have ability to test, legislation))

* Elections Canada confirms that they now have the ability to test but they are still awaiting final approval from Parliament.
* Elections Canada is busy preparing for the October 21 Federal Elections. The new legislation comes into force on June 13.
* The innovation branch is already at work scoping out the types of technology to be looked at and work is in the early stages.
* No time frame as yet as to how early testing will begin. It is a priority now that legislation is in place.
* Participant comments that if this is not in place by the time of the first by election following the Federal Election, there could be a Human Rights case and additionally with no Braille list of candidates available at the advanced polls may also mean possible Human Rights cases.

### From participant – (advanced polls and election day)

* Clarification is sort on the availability of a Braille ballot ad the advanced polls and a question is asked about whether the same treatment will be provided to Blind voters at advanced polls as is given on Election Day.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (ballots, training)

* There will be no Braille ballot available at advanced polls.
* Training has been updated to ask the elector what they need, listen to what the elector says, and act to address their need.
* Almost 300,000 people will be hired.
* Some of the hires may not deliver equitable services and this is to be expected.
* Significant investment has been made in training but there will always be exceptions.
* Participant clarifies that they are interested in the advanced polls and their ability to vote independently.
* Elections Canada states that there has never been a Braille ballot and that non has ever been available either at the advanced polls or on Election Day.
* There is a Braille template.

### From participant – (audio machines)

* Express discouragement that there will be no use of audio machines as these were used during the Provincial Election of 2018 as well as during the Municipal Election of 2018.
* This would be disenfranchising those voters who do not know Braille because they would not be able to vote independently. The participant expresses great surprise that there is no option for an audio machine.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (testing of audio machines)

* Elections Canada reiterates that those machines were used in the recent Provincial and Municipal elections but now that legislation is in place testing will be moving forward.
* Previously special authority had to be obtained from both houses of Parliament but now only approval from the House of Commons is needed.
* The participant comments that not everyone can vote independently and this is not acceptable given that we are going to have an accessible Canada Act in place shortly.

### From participant – (audio machines, alternate formats)

* A comment is made that in Vancouver the use of audio machines was quite successful in a recent Municipal Election.
* Question: Is there going to be alternate formats for the information that is being mailed to households?
* And if not will it be available on the website in an alternate format that can be downloaded so that it can be read independently?
* Comment: The participant believes that there are companies in each Province that would help to make Braille lists of candidates available at the advanced polls.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (voter info to households, guide)

* Mail-outs to households will not be in alternate format, however, the guide to the Federal Election will be available in alternate format.
* It will be available in Braille, large print, audio, and will be available through national organizations such as the CCD, CNIB, and others.
* One can also order these materials by calling Elections Canada.
* Participant seeks clarification that materials mailed to households would not be available in alternate format.
* Is the information in the material mailed to households different from the guide to the Federal Election?
* Elections Canada clarifies that the dates in both sets of materials would be different as the exact dates are not available until the actual Election is called.
* The exact information is also available on the Elections Canada website in alternate format.

### From participant – (Human Rights complaints)

* Participant agrees that there may be some Human Rights complaints.
* Used the voting machine in the last Provincial Election.
* It was difficult to use the ballot because of the circles being too small and difficulty in using a pencil.
* Audio machines are preferable and no excuse for not having accessible voting in 2019.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (no assistive voting machines)

* At the Federal level there will be no assistive voting machines for 2019.
* Elections Canada now has the authority to test these machines and this is going to be a priority after the next Federal Election.

### From participant – (special pencil)

* Is there going to be a special pencil at all voting stations across the country?

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (easy to grip pencil)

* Yes, the easy to grip pencil will be available at all polling stations across the country. At advanced polls, regular polls, and at returning offices.
* They have all been tested and with a variety of disability groups.
* The ballot has been improved so that one can also put a check mark instead of an x or a line.
* It will also be explained verbally.

### From participant – (assistive devices)

* If assistive devices are taken into the booth and the wrong button is accidentally pressed then the ballot would be spoiled.
* Question: Do the pencils make a raised mark on the ballot?

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (size and shape of the pencil)

* Not sure. The answer may be no but this question has not arisen before now.
* The emphasis is more around the shape and size of the pencil and not the type of led in the pencil.
* Participant reiterates a previous suggestion that there are companies across the country that can print quantities of Braille lists of candidates upon demand.
* Elections Canada reiterates that it is a timing issue and that it is a particular issue for remote areas.
* Elections Canada also reiterates that one can bring their own marking pencil.

### From participant – (online voting in Quebec)

* In Quebec online voting is used so why does Elections Canada not use this?
* One can use a password to see medical records.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (online medical and banking)

* There are differences between online medical access and online banking access as opposed to online voting.
* The ability to fully audit the online voting process. One cannot go back and erase the past.
* Authentication is a challenge; to know who one is.
* Example, when it comes to the decision making process in a domestic situation. When voting from home, is the person being told that they must vote in a particular way.
* Secrecy and coercion are two things for consideration.
* Monitoring for online banking and online access to health records are more closely followed than with online voting.
* It is much easier for someone to hack into online voting.
* Participant suggests the use of email addresses and suggests that there may be Human Rights complaints because of the passage of the Accessible Canada Act.
* Elections Canada suggests that there could be controlled online electronic voting for certain audiences and that this audience could be one of them.
* It may be a possibility, going on a mass scale at this point is not possible and a guestimate would probably be in the next 10 years.

### From participant – (coercion)

* Comment: The government seems to be concerned about coercion yet it is not too concerned that the officer at the polling station would vote the way that the voter wants.
* Participant also reiterates about the availability of Braille printers across the country who are able to provide Braille lists on a timely basis.
* In the case of assistive machines: Don’t spend so much time testing something that we know already works.

### From participant – (accessibility)

* Comment: Accessibility is not easy. Is happy with the Government’s efforts. Happy with the legislation. Attitude is everything.
* The threatening of Human Rights complaints is not helpful. Frustration is understood but people are really trying.

### From participant – (signage for polling stations)

* Finding polling stations is difficult as signage is woefully inadequate.
* When a complaint was made participant was told that it was good enough.
* The sidewalk to the polling station was not safe for walking.
* Question: What has been done to ensure that polling stations are accessible for those driving and walking?

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (checkpoints, signage)

* The 35 checkpoints include such things as the ability to find doors, lighting, paved parking lots, ramps leading into the building, door openers into the building itself, proximity of polling stations, well known halls or community centres that people are comfortable going to.
* Signage is also one of the criteria.
* Because Elections Canada does not own the polling station, signage is sometimes a problem.
* The response of it being good enough is not a good enough response.

### From participant – (Braille lists, spoiled ballots)

* Comments: Dismayed at not being able to have Braille lists of candidates at the advanced polls.
* Never sure if they spoiled their ballot because of uncertainty with regard to where they had put either a check mark, x, or line in the circle.
* Does not ever want anyone to accompany them into the booth.
* Coercion is also a concern when it comes to family members; not just through the online way.

### Feedback from Elections Canada –

* Elections Canada acknowledges appreciation.

### From participant – (candidates to confirm earlier)

* Dismay that Braille lists of candidates are not going to be available at advanced polls but it was previously stated that they were available at past advanced polls.
* Question: Would it be possible for candidates to finalize earlier in the game so that there would be more time to print the Braille lists and distribute to the polling stations?
* Each Province has their own printing resources.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (deadlines for candidates)

* Deadlines for candidates is actually in the legislation. It has not been raised in the past.
* It could be considered at some point in time
* Investing in Braille resources as opposed to getting the deadlines for candidates to submit may be a better alternative. That is, the investment in more Braille resources may be better time spent rather than trying to have the legislation changed.

### From participant – (Revenue Canada, secure online process)

* Suggestion: Revenue Canada uses a secure online process for authentication. Service Canada does as well.
* Could Elections Canada do the same?
* Voting in secrecy has never been possible and it should be.

### Feedback from Elections Canada –

* None.

### From participant – (minimum age for helpers, oaths)

* Question: Is there an age for helpers to be in order to help?
* In the last Election in Quebec the helper was required to sign an oath but it was not in the preferred language.
* Question: Is there a requirement that oaths must be provided in both official languages? In this case it was only in French.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (helpers, ballots, oaths)

* Verifying the age of the helper.
* Ballots are in both official languages.
* Helpers do not need to be Canadian citizens and do not need to be the age of 18. They do not need to be of voting age.
* Participant repeats that when they went to the voting station for the last election the oath was not in their helper’s preferred language. It was only in French.
* Participant requests clarification on having the oath in both languages.
* Elections Canada reiterates that oaths are supposed to be in both languages. They ask for clarification as to whether this was a Federal Election.
* Participant says that it was a Federal Election.
* Elections Canada makes note of this and advises the participant to launch an official complaint if it happens again.

### From participant – (electronic voting, next by election)

* Expresses disappointment re the inability to vote electronically.
* Question: With legislation just being passed for testing of electronic voting and Elections Canada going to make this a priority, will it be ready in time for when the next by election is held, or two years down the road, or is Elections Canada ready now? Or is there a lot of work to be done before the next by election?
* The next question concerns the pencil. If a pencil is used that leaves a raised mark, would this spoil the ballot?

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (raised marking pencil, to verify)

* One can bring their own pencil. A raised pencil should be acceptable.
* Verification will be sought and a response will be given to participants.
* Re the first question, the message has been taken very loud and clear from this audience.
* Elections Canada is hearing that the voting machines work very well in BC and Ontario so why is there a need to do more work
* These are the two key messages that will be taken back.
* Participant comments that the audible electronic voting machine works very well in several Provinces.
* Suggests that maybe they could bring in nail polish to make their mark on the ballot.
* Elections Canada promises to seek verification on this and to come back to participants with an answer.

### From participant – (online security challenges)

* Participant comments that they believe that Elections Canada has done a good job at explaining the security challenges for online voting versus that for online banking.
* The Government needs to know that the person logging in has the right to do so and that the ballot that they are casting is the one that they wish to cast.
* There must be complete secrecy without having anyone being able to check.
* The voting system must be robust enough in order to handle cyber attacks.
* Question: Does the mark need to be in a particular style? Or can one circle the name of the candidate?

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (mark must be placed in the circle)

* Elections Canada reiterates that the ballot needs to be marked in the circle. One cannot circle the name of the candidate.

### From participant – (voter registration cards)

* Re the voting registration cards: Could they get a Braille format of it and how does one go about getting it.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (voter information card)

* It is not available in Braille but one can get their voter information card from Elections Canada’s website.
* One needs to type in their postal code and they will receive the same information that is on their personalized voter information card.
* It will tell you where to go to vote, voting options, etc.
* If you wish to confirm that you are registered to vote then you can do this through the online voter registration system and you will also be told where to go in order to vote.

### From participant – (template)

* Participant states that they have never used the template to vote before because their spouse did it for them.
* They do not use Braille.
* Question: How does it work?

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (explanation to be given)

* Elections Canada states that the participant would need to have someone assist them.
* Participant states that are not totally blind but does not have enough vision to mark their ballot.
* Elections Canada suggests that the participant use the lit magnifier with four times magnification but the participant says that it will not help.
* Suggestion from one of the hosts: Person from Elections Canada came in and read out the list, the host counted the holes in the template, and made their mark in the chosen circle. And the Elections Canada person left after they had read the list.
* Elections Canada agrees.
* Participant asks why is online voting allowed in municipal voting?
* Elections Canada states that for federal elections there is a very high level of security that needs to be met and that with regard to municipal elections, it is very unlikely that one would want to hack into these elections at this level.
* The same at the provincial level where they may be the same level of interest.
* The interest for hackers at the federal level is much greater than at the provincial or municipal level. Hence the high level of security at the federal level.

### From participant – (clarification of legislation)

* Participant seeks clarification on the legislation that is being referred to.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (bill C-76)

* The bill is C-76 and is referred to as the Elections Modernization Act.
* It received Royal Assent in December 2018.
* It comes into force on June 13.
* There will be components of this bill that will not be put into place for the 2019 October 21 Election.

### From participant – (assistive device)

* Question: Is one able to bring in their own assistive device? Example, Ira or Zoom?
* Comment: There should be a way to get to the polling station via public transit.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (assistive device, app)

* Elections Canada confirms that one can bring in their own assistive electronic device. You can use an app on your phone.
* You will be cautioned about uploading your ballot to the Internet because it could compromise secrecy.
* Returning officers are directed to consider the use of public transit in their selection of polling station.
* In some Ridings there are assistant returning officers because of their geography.
* Elections Canada also states that now that they have authority to test electronic devices they can do so through a pilot project and they do not need to get approval from the Senate in order to do so.

### From participant – (no voting independently)

* Participant is disillusioned that they are unable to vote independently in a Federal election.
* They have been able to vote independently in a Municipal election, did it on the phone and entered a code.
* Comment: Susan mentioned that it could take 10 years for us to be able to vote electronically and verify our votes.
* Comment: Now that the law has been passed, where is Elections Canada going to get testers and where does one volunteer to be testers.

### Feedback from Elections Canada – (online voting, testers)

* Elections Canada clarifies the following: If they were to go with online for every Canadian it would probably be a 10 year horizon and this is the opinion of Susan Torosian and not the CEO of Elections Canada or anyone else.
* Testing of assistive technology with online voting will be actioned very quickly.
* The message has been taken that this needs to be done by the time that the first by election is called.
* With regard to signing up to be testers, a pilot would be conducted through a simulation and it would be done through the communities, organizations, the advisory group on disability issues, and persons would be sought to run through the tests with Elections Canada.

The end