



Spring 2004

Backgrounder

British Columbia's Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

The Citizens' Assembly is an independent, non-partisan, diverse group of British Columbians with a unique and important job – reviewing BC's electoral system.

This process is unique in Canadian history. Never have randomly selected citizens played such a vital role in shaping the democratic process.

The Assembly has been learning about electoral systems – the way democracies elect their political representatives. In the fall, after listening to British Columbians in a series of public hearings, the Assembly will recommend the system it believes will work best for our province.

If the Citizens' Assembly recommends no change, our existing electoral system will be reaffirmed and maintained. If, however, the Assembly recommends a change, this decision will be put directly to the voters of BC in a May 2005 referendum. And, if British Columbians choose to endorse the recommendation, the new electoral system would come into effect with the 2009 election.

The Citizens' Assembly comprises 160 British Columbians, plus the Chair, Dr. Jack Blaney. These members have been randomly chosen from the provincial voters list to:

- ensure the member-selection process was as fair and unbiased as possible
- create a Citizens' Assembly that is reasonably representative of British Columbians
- reflect the gender, age and regional make-up of the province

The Citizens' Assembly was launched in May 2003 by the Government of British Columbia with the unanimous support of the BC Legislature. It was created in response to a concern voiced by some British Columbians that our provincial electoral system needed a review.

What is the Citizens' Assembly doing?

There are three phases to the work of the Citizens' Assembly:

Learning: Members have been learning about our current electoral system as well as other electoral systems used around the world.

Public Hearings: Hearings are scheduled for May and June 2004 in 49 communities throughout BC, allowing Assembly members to hear what their fellow citizens have to say about electoral reform.

Deliberation: In the fall, the Citizens' Assembly will decide whether our current electoral system should be changed and, if so, they will recommend a new system.

The Citizens' Assembly will report its recommendation to the Attorney General and to the people of British Columbia in December 2004.

If the Citizens' Assembly suggests a change, its report will describe the pros and cons of both our current system and the recommended system, explaining why the new system is preferred. It will also frame the referendum question on this issue for the May 2005 provincial election.

Learning	Public Hearings	Deliberation	Final Recommendation
Jan – Mar 2004	May – June 2004	Sept – Nov 2004	Dec 2004
January 10 – 11 January 24 – 25 February 7 – 8 February 21 – 22 March 6 – 7 March 20 – 21	49 hearings throughout BC. Then, June 26-27, the Assembly will gather in Prince George to review and discuss what they heard from British Columbians.	September 11 – 12 September 25 – 26 October 16 – 17 October 23 – 24 November 13 – 14	Citizens' Assembly members submit a report of their recommendation on British Columbia's electoral system.
In Vancouver	All regions of BC	In Vancouver	

Get “plugged in”

The website www.citizensassembly.bc.ca is updated regularly and contains a plethora of useful information and links.

General information – The website offers such information as names and brief biographies of all 161 members, information on staff, an overview of the process, answers to frequently asked questions, and documentation related to the mandate and founding of the Assembly.

Electoral system materials – Learning and educational materials provided to Assembly members are regularly posted on the website, as are video and audio recordings from each of the Assembly's learning sessions. In addition, you'll find a list of recommended readings and links to relevant websites. Learn along with the Assembly and track its progress.

Submissions – People are welcome to make submissions to the Assembly online or by mail. A complete list of all submissions received, together with abstracts, is available on the website.

Share your thoughts – If you have some thoughts related to our electoral system, you can register to present at a public hearing either by calling our office and requesting a registration form or by registering online. Registering ensures you have a spot on the agenda. Even if you haven't registered, however, you are most welcome to speak at a public hearing once registered presenters have delivered their presentations. The Assembly is eager to have a dialogue with British Columbians about BC's electoral system.

News – All current and past media releases are posted, as are all newsletters. You can also subscribe online to the Citizens' Assembly newsletter.

Get involved

Your views are important. Make a submission or share your views at a public hearing. This is your chance to have a say in how British Columbians choose our provincial representatives.

Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

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