

# INFLUENCE POWER

## Get Involved in Provincial & Federal Elections

### Why should OSSTF/FEESO get involved in provincial and federal elections?

Our federal and provincial governments make decisions that play a critical role in our lives and it matters who wins. When OSSTF/FEESO and its members get involved in federal and provincial elections, we are able to affect who gets elected and what issues are raised.

#### Remember:

- Working on campaigns gives us influence; sitting on the sidelines doesn't.
- Provincial governments are responsible for education. Their policy and budget decisions determine our students' learning, and our working conditions.
- Governments make decisions in many other areas that affect us, our families and our communities, including:
  - ✓ social programs such as healthcare, pensions, child care and employment insurance;
  - ✓ legal rights and freedoms, including freedom of speech and assembly, and human rights protections;
  - ✓ employment and workplace safety standards;
  - ✓ environmental regulations;
  - ✓ transportation;
  - ✓ immigration and refugee regulations;
  - ✓ criminal justice and policing.

### Developing a campaign strategy

We are more effective when we have a clear plan of action and stick to it. Each election plan must be tailored to the times, but some guidelines are:

#### • Set clear goals:

Clear provincial and local goals make it easier to focus effort. Is the goal to defeat an incumbent government or candidate? To get attention for a particular issue? Deciding on your priorities sets the framework for action.

#### • Get the issues right:

The issues must be ones that voters care about. If our concerns don't resonate, they won't get attention from voters or candidates.

#### • Target resources:

Concentrate your available time, workers, and money on what will be most effective. Don't squander resources trying to do a little of everything.

#### • Coordinate with others:

Seek out and work with labour and community allies to reinforce common messages and broaden support.

#### • Don't reinvent the wheel:

Candidates already have a team to run their campaigns. The most effective way to support an endorsed candidate is to give direct support to that campaign.

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### What are OSSTF/FEESO's strengths in provincial elections?

OSSTF/FEESO can be influential in provincial election campaigns:

- our members live and work in Ontario so we can concentrate our efforts;
- our members' opinions on education have weight because of the work we do with students;
- our members have a presence in communities across the province so our message is widespread;
- our members have strong ties to many local organizations such as Labour Councils, parent associations, and service and community groups;
- our members have valuable skills and resources to offer endorsed candidates.

It also makes a difference when OSSTF/FEESO and its members get involved in federal elections. This influence is stronger when we work alongside other labour and social action groups on issues of common concern. One example of this would be the Canadian Labour Congress' *Better Choice Campaign*.

### Getting members involved

- **Keep members informed:** Don't take people or their votes for granted. Reach out regularly to let members know about the candidates and issues, and to ask for their support.
- **Make it easy:** Offer people simple and direct ways to get involved.
- **Have some fun:** Don't burn people out. It doesn't have to be all work and no play. Plan some social events or just take a break for conversation and refreshment.
- **Don't forget to say thanks:** Acknowledge members' contributions and support and express your appreciation for their efforts.

### How OSSTF/FEESO can make a difference

Getting involved helps the candidates we support, and it helps us. More workers on the campaign trail and more voters at the ballot box are key to winning elections. After the election, the newly elected representative is more likely to have an open door and listen to our concerns.

#### • Pre-election activities:

A campaign is short. Get your action plan and members ready before it starts. Establish a relationship with endorsed candidates and their campaign organizers. Work with allies on common issues. Find opportunities to profile education issues in your community. Let members know who the endorsed candidate is and what they can do to help.

#### • During the campaign:

Encourage members to work for the endorsed candidate. Organize volunteers. Ask for donations. Distribute OSSTF/FEESO and the candidate's material to members. Canvass members by telephone or worksite visits.

#### • Getting out the vote:

It's critical that your members vote. Develop a strategy to encourage a strong turnout at the advance polls and on election day.

#### • After the polls close, stay in touch and keep visible:

Don't turn into a pumpkin when the victory party is over. Remind your elected representative who you are. Send a letter of congratulations. Set up a meeting. Write or call about any concerns. Go to fundraisers or constituency events. Encourage other OSSTF/FEESO members to stay involved too.

### Money talks ... but be cautious with donations

Election campaigns cost money and endorsed candidates will welcome the financial contributions we make. But find out what current election financing laws say to avoid creating a problem for the candidate or OSSTF/FEESO. If in doubt, check with OSSTF/FEESO's provincial office.

### Resources:

- OSSTF Election Kit. *Shifting the Balance of Power*, 2003
- OSSTF/FEESO. *Make It Count*, Provincial Election 2007