

INFLUENCE POWER

Participate in Trustee & Municipal Campaigns

Why get involved in municipal and trustee elections?

Involvement in municipal and school board elections offers a real opportunity to make a difference for our communities and for public education. With the move to four year terms, these elections are even more important.

As our elected representatives, trustees are responsible for overseeing public education at the local level. Trustees play a critical role regarding curriculum implementation, school operations, and board policies — not to mention collective bargaining. Elections allow us to hold these elected representatives accountable for their decisions and give us an opportunity to raise awareness about education issues within our communities.

Electing strong and progressive representatives to municipal government is equally important. Their decisions about local issues shape our communities in significant ways that have an immediate impact on our daily lives and those of our students and their families.

Finding strong trustee candidates:

Having strong candidates is key to establishing a board of education which is progressive, strong and caring.

- Evaluate incumbent trustees on their voting records and the role they have played while in office.
- Approach possible candidates early. Look for people with a stake in the public education system, or activists and leaders in the community or labour movement with an open-minded approach.
- Ensure potential new candidates are aware of the support you and others can provide as they face the challenges of their new role.
- Interview candidates to find out their position on key education issues before making an endorsement.
- Consult regularly with other labour, education and community groups you have been working with to ensure you have their support.

Creating a municipal/trustee election coalition

The profile of trustee elections and education issues, as well as our ability to influence the results, is greater when we are able to bring groups together to support a common campaign. The same is true for municipal elections. This includes working with:

• **Labour Councils:**

Working with the Labour Council and its affiliates allows us to share information, bring together resources and expertise, and publicize issues and endorsements across our collective memberships. Labour Councils are often heavily involved in municipal issues and campaigns. Uniting our efforts will help boost interest in the elections for school board trustees.

• **Other education unions:**

It is far better to have a common set of endorsements than to split the vote. A united voice will also go a long way to ensure the important issues get raised and endorsed candidates are successful.

• **Parent and education groups:**

The support of parent and other education groups creates important relationships for the future and broadens the network of support.

• **Community organizations:**

Many community groups are concerned about issues related to education and our schools. This can range from community use of schools to equity issues to youth violence. Service organizations and faith groups should also be approached for support.

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Get started now

It is never too early to start getting organized. Prepare the foundation for a winning campaign by recruiting good candidates and working with others in education, the labour movement, and the community to get endorsements and develop a strong base of support. Remember that having an effective candidate, strong issues and a well-run campaign is more likely to result in victory at the local level than in provincial or federal elections. Municipal and trustee elections are different from provincial or federal elections because there is a lower voter turnout and political parties are rarely involved.

This means we can play an important and much more direct role in ensuring a positive result through:

- recruiting and endorsing candidates;
- working on candidate campaigns;
- making donations;
- encouraging member support and voting;
- working together with others in the community;
- helping candidates and their teams take advantage of available training opportunities such as those offered by the Canadian Labour Congress.

Resources:

- OSSTF. *Trustee Election Kit 2003*, August 2003
- Canadian Labour Congress. *Mobilizing to Win*, Fall 2005

Reaching our members

As well as working with our campaign partners, we need a plan to involve our members. This includes:

• **Setting the table:**

Start early to inform members about the trustee and municipal election strategy and why it is important. Make sure members know who the endorsed candidates are. Build on regular OSSTF/FEESO communication tools and get the message out by using some or all of the following: direct mailings, phoning, emails and website postings, and notices for worksite bulletin boards.

• **Getting out the vote:**

Remind all members to get out to vote (and take their friends and families) by sending out flyers, emails or phoning. Stress the importance of voting in the advance poll. Book off members to help.

• **Money talks:**

Financial resources are critical both to the candidate's campaign and your election strategy. Asking members for donations to the candidates is essential. You should also investigate and request funding from provincial OSSTF/FEESO.

When the votes are all counted

Remember to follow up with new trustees and municipal representatives after the election is over.

• **Send congratulations:**

Keep on friendly terms with those you supported and those you didn't.

• **Keep in touch:**

Make an effort to keep doors open. Meet regularly to discuss issues and provide information.

• **Monitor performance:**

Attend meetings to observe and keep track of the role your trustees and municipal representatives are playing on key issues both behind the scenes and in public.

• **Offer support:**

Provide information, show up for community meetings, and invite the representative to speak at local events and meet constituents.