

CFMS/FMEQ Federal Election Strategy: “DIY” Toolkit

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Purpose and Objectives of the CFMS/FMEQ Federal Election Strategy

- Foster excitement, interest, and engagement of medical students around voting in the federal election, the election process, and civic engagement
- Informing Canadian medical students with objective data to help make decisions about the major federal political parties and their points on various health-related issues
- Facilitating issues-based advocacy for Canadian medical students on various priority issues concerning the medical student community, the healthcare system, and the health of Canadians

About the CFMS

- The CFMS was founded in 1977 by Canadian medical students, and today 42 years later, the Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) represents over 8,400 medical students at 15 medical schools across Canada. As the national voice of Canadian medical students, the CFMS are tomorrow's physicians leading for health today with the aim to connect, support, and represent its membership as they learn to serve patients and society.

About the FMEQ

- The "Fédération médicale étudiante du Québec" or FMEQ was founded in 1974 by the four medical student associations in Quebec, – namely the AGÉMUS of the University of Sherbrooke, the MSS of McGill University, the RÉMUL of Laval University and the AEEMUM of the University of Montreal – representing more than 4,000 medical students. The FMEQ has the role of defending and promoting the collective interests specific to medical students in Quebec particularly in pedagogical, political and social matters. It promotes communication and collaboration between student associations and their members. It establishes partnerships to provide specific services to associative and individual members.

Part 1: Introduction to Canadian Federal Elections

Introduction to Canadian Federal Elections

Canada’s Parliamentary and Executive system is comprised of:

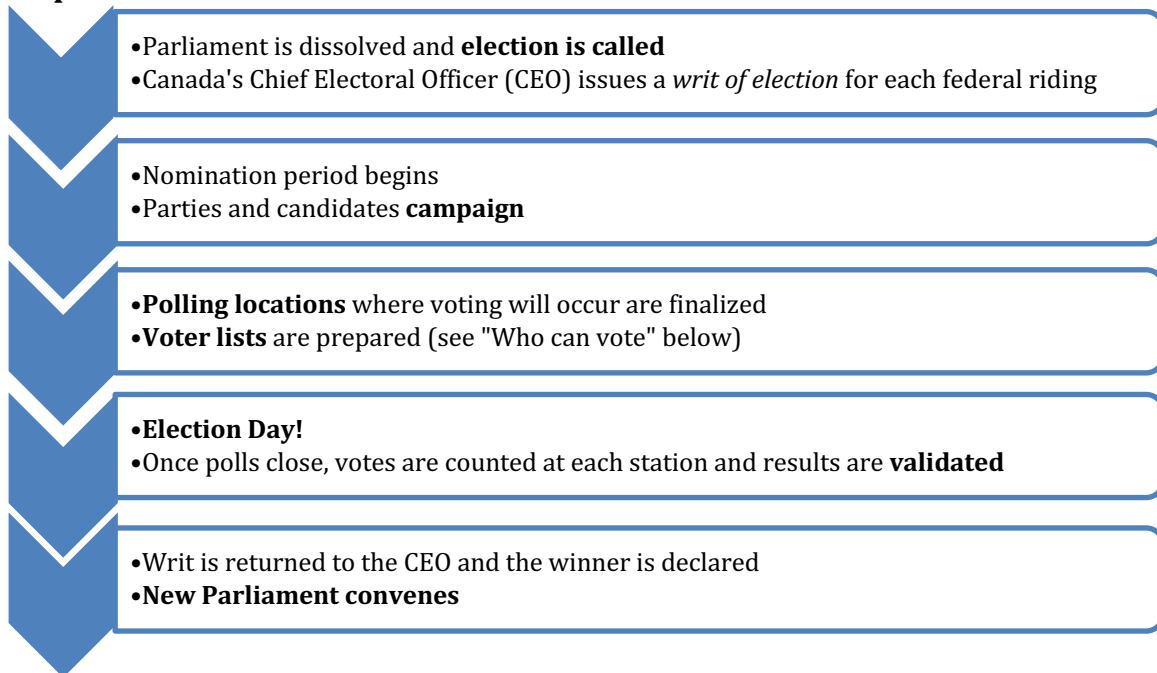
The Governor General: Officially represents the Queen

The Prime Minister: Leader of political party holding the most MPs in the House

The Senate: Legislative body appointed by the Prime Minister

The House of Commons: Comprised of 338 Members of Parliament (MPs) elected by citizens in the same number of electoral districts

Steps of a Canadian Federal Election



How often are federal elections called and who can call them?

General elections in Canada are called every four years on the third Monday in October, meaning that the next Federal election will be Monday October 21, 2019. This will be Canada’s 43rd general election. According to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Members of Parliament can be elected for a maximum of 5 years after which they need to be re-elected to continue service.

The Governor General calls elections at these times by “dissolving” Parliament. She/he also has the power to call a general election at an earlier date if: 1) the Government loses a confidence vote in the House of Commons, or 2) at any time on the advice of the Prime Minister.

Ridings and Political Parties

In federal elections, citizens vote to elect their local Member of Parliament (MP) who will then represent them in the House of Commons. This individual represents a particular federal electoral district called a *riding*. There are 338 electoral ridings in Canada and the geographical divisions of these are created based on a formula set out in the Constitution Act, 1867.

Most MPs run in their riding under the affiliation of a political party, although they do not have to. There are many more parties than the few we usually hear about, but they historically have not won representation in the House of Commons. To have official status in the House of Commons a party must win at least 12 seats.

“First-past-the-post System”

In every electoral district, the candidate with the highest number of votes in that riding wins a seat in the House of Commons – importantly, they do not need to achieve more than 50% of the votes to win! This is known as a *first-past-the-post* or *single-member plurality* system. From here, the political party with the greatest number of seats in the House will form the new government. According to tradition, the party with the second highest number of MPs in the House becomes the official Opposition party.

Political Parties

Some of the most well-known political parties in Canada include: **The Liberal Party of Canada, The Conservative Party of Canada, The New Democratic Party of Canada, The Green Party of Canada, and Le Bloc Québécois**

What are minority and majority governments?

If a party wins more than 50% of the seats in the House of Commons, a majority government forms, which gives the Government control over the House by virtue of carrying more than half of the voting power. If the winning party has less than half of the seats, a minority government will form. This means that the other parties in the House have the ability to block the Government’s bills from passing and have more power to bring down the Government in a vote of non-confidence.

What happens to government during the election period?

Upon dissolution of the government, all activity ceases. This includes passing bills and responding to petitions. Only administrative duties will continue until the new Parliament is convened with certain exceptions.

Who Can Vote and How to Do It

Who can vote in the federal election?

Any Canadian citizen who is 18 years of age or older on election day.

How to vote?

There’s a catch though, *you must be registered to vote!* You’ll know you are registered if you received a voting card in the mail prior to election day.

Online Voter Registration:

- As of 2012, voters can check online to see whether they are registered to vote using their name, date of birth, and address. If your name is not listed, you can have it added to the voters list up until the *Tuesday prior to the election*.

Check to see if you are registered in advance of election day here: <https://ereg.elections.ca/> or call any Elections Canada office.

Once registered, there are many ways to vote:

- 1) Usually, voters cast ballots **in-person** at the designated polling station in the riding they are registered in, using proof of identity and address.
- 2) You may also vote ahead of time in **advanced polls** which open in ridings 1-2 weeks prior to the election.
- 3) If you will be outside your registered riding during the Election Day and the dates of advanced polls, you can **apply online for a special ballot ASAP once an election is called**. You can fill this out and either a) deliver it in person to your local Elections Canada Office if you are somewhere within Canada or b) send it by mail (Note: If you are mailing from outside Canada, be sure to leave enough time for the ballot to be received by 6pm on election day).

Knowing where to Vote

Electoral ridings are divided into polling divisions. Your voting card will let you know which polling location you can vote at. It's often a public building such as a school. Some university campuses hold polling stations for their students so check to see if yours does!

Note for Students: If you live in two places (i.e. one while at school and one where your family resides) you may choose *either one* of these to vote in as long as you can provide proof of address. Then be sure to go online (link above) to ensure you are registered to vote in your riding of choice.

Acceptable ID to vote:

- 1) One original piece of ID issued by a Canadian government that contains the voter's name, photo, and address (for example, your driver's license).
- OR
- 2) Two original pieces of ID; each must display the voter's name and one must show their address (for example, your health card plus a hydro bill)

Find the list of acceptable IDs and polling locations at www.elections.ca

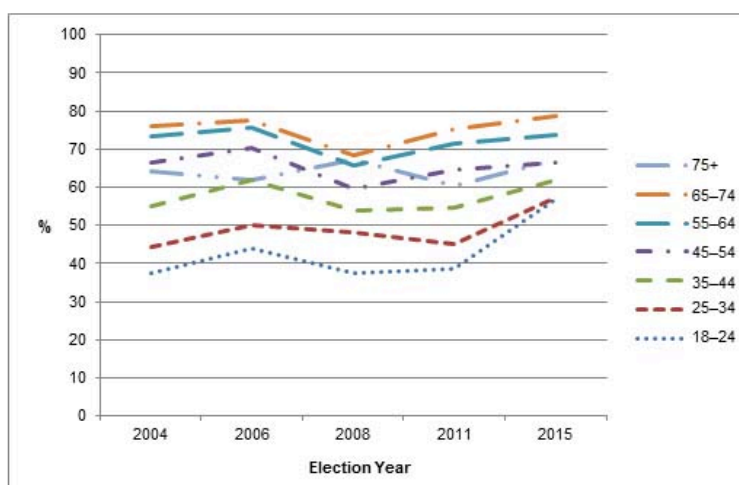
Does the Student Vote Matter?

It is often said that young adults, and students, are not engaged in the political process. We've all heard somewhere or other that our vote “doesn't count”, or that we're “apathetic”. But is that true? Do we hold any power in the political process?

Overall, voter turnout in Canada is not as high as you might think. In 2008, voter turnout was the lowest it had ever been since Confederation, with only 56.5% of the eligible population casting a ballot. That number has been slowly increasing, to 58.5% in the 2011 election and 66.1% in the 2015 election, however it has not

reached over 70% since 1993. When we look at the youth vote specifically, in 2011 only about 39% of voters aged 18-24 turned out, and 45.1% of voters aged 25-34. In 2015, those numbers drastically increased to 57.1% of voters aged 18-24 and 57.4% of voters aged 25-34.

Figure 2 – Estimated Voter Turnout in Canada by Age Group, 2004–2015



Source: Figure prepared by Geneviève Gosselin of the Library of Parliament based on the table “Estimated Voter Turnout by Age Group (2004–2015) (Based on electoral population)” in Elections Canada, “1.4 Voter Participation,” *Retrospective Report on the 42nd General Election of October 19, 2015*, September 2016, p. 31.

Before the 2015 election it was generally assumed that it was normal for youth not to vote, and that as people age they will engage more in the civic process. This was called the “Life Cycle Effect”. However, evidence supporting this theory seems to be weakening – which could drastically change how the political system works in Canada.

A recent study by The Samara Centre for Democracy, a non-partisan charity dedicated to strengthening Canada’s Democracy, found that Canadian youth (aged 18-29) rate 11 percentage points higher, on average, than older populations across 18 markers of political participation. This study looked at political engagement in a broader lens, and examined four variables in 5 different sectors, and 18 markers, of political engagement;

1. Formal Engagement: includes being a member of a party, attending a political meeting or speech, volunteering for a campaign, organizing a public event about politics, etc.
2. Activism: signing petitions, boycotting, protesting, and demonstrating

3. Civic Engagement: donating to a charity, volunteering for a charitable cause, being active in a group or organization and working with others to solve a community problem
4. Discussion: Discussing politics and political issues, following a politician on social media, circulating or reposting comments, etc.

Interestingly enough, youth were found to have the highest rates of participation in all markers of activism, and discussion. Furthermore, youth were tied with seniors (aged >56 years) in party membership, and donating money to a candidate. They also far outperformed seniors in attending a political meeting or speech, giving a political speech in public, and organizing events. Finally, it is important to note that youth outperformed adults (aged 30-55) in all 18 markers.

So if we're to believe these statistics, we cannot endorse the notion that youth are apathetic and disengaged from civic and political processes. So why is voter turnout so low? Well the same study from Samara Democracy also states that one of the most important variables in predicting a person's likelihood to vote is whether or not they've been contacted by a candidate. In 2014 Canadians were asked about five different methods that federal parties, candidates, and MPs had used to reach out; mail, phone, email, in person and on a social network. Responses showed that 75% of people over the age of 56, 58% of people aged 30-55, and 55% of people aged 18-29 were contacted by one or more methods. The study concludes by saying that a major reason youth don't vote is because the system itself doesn't reach out and include them in the process.

Another hypothesis as to why youth turnout is low is because of globalization. This theory, postulated in a position paper by Elections Canada, states that as the economy becomes more global, there is a sense that federal governments become more irrelevant. The same paper also states that youth have different perceptions, attitudes and values that do not necessarily align with one or another party, and youth therefore do not develop attachment to any of the parties, do not identify with a party and therefore have no clear preference or incentive to vote for one over the other.

Regardless of the myriad of hypotheses about why youth traditionally don't vote, what is clear is that while we might be below the national average in the polls, we are anything but apathetic, disengaged, and powerless. Hence, the very reason why we have created this DIY toolkit to encourage CFMS/FMEQ medical students to harness their civic engagement skills and to go out to vote in the upcoming election!

Part 2: Engaging with the federal election in your community

Goals of community engagement

Given what we now know about youth engagement in the elections process and the lack of contact between candidates and youth voters, the CFMS/FMEQ would like to encourage medical students to reach out to candidates in their home and medical school ridings – to have conversations, to engage in the various issues that matter to you and your community, and to encourage others to do the same!

The CFMS/FMEQ are non-partisan organizations and we welcome constructive dissenting views and respectful debate. We hope to encourage the sharing of resources and ideas to harness the power of our collective and individual voices in putting health and healthcare back onto the political agenda. We also hope to empower students to vote and engage in the political process in any means they feel most comfortable with!

Possible Activities

There are any number of ways to engage with the upcoming federal election at your medical school and in your community! Some suggestions include:

1. Host a town hall discussing community issues or a debate with candidates
 - In order to focus the conversation, it can be helpful to outline a particular theme/topic or have particular questions in mind to help frame the conversation – this could be something health and healthcare related! Please keep an eye out for the CFMS federal election primer on a variety of issues and areas for conversation.
 - Be sure to set some guidelines with those who confirm to attend, including reminding them that the intention is for a non-partisan event to explore a variety of community issues. We’d also recommend having a moderator who is skilled or prepared for moderating inappropriate questions or comments, and who can keep the conversation productive.
2. Meet with an MP in their office to discuss issues and public policy
 - Meeting with your home or school riding local MP is a wonderful way to get to know your representative in Ottawa and share your thoughts about local issues in the community, and recommendations related to federal public policy!
 - A large component of the role of an MP is to meet with constituents and hear about the issues they care about and that are affecting them. Make best use of this opportunity to learn more about how they can best represent your views and ideas on behalf of your community.

- A meeting can be scheduled easily by sending an email to their office, and you can go to the meeting as a group to discuss a variety of issues if preferred!
 - If you want to speak with them about a specific topic, it can be helpful to email them a summary of the issue and your points beforehand. This will help their office make sure the MP is prepared for a productive discussion.
 - If you happen to be in Ottawa, you can also offer to meet with your MP on Parliament Hill and get a tour of the House of Commons!
3. Ask to meet with candidates
- Don't be afraid to ask them what their views are on issues, what they can do for you and your community, and how they support medical students and health and healthcare related issues.
 - As candidates for various political parties are nominated and confirmed for your community, look out for their contact information on social media, and connect with them by reaching out via email or visit an event or talk they are attending to learn more about their platforms!
4. Social media campaign
- Social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) is a powerful form of communication, especially for sharing updates related to the upcoming federal election.
 - If you share a message to your MP on various social media platforms, chances are they will reply to give an answer or offer to follow-up! Engage with your MPs and candidates on social media, and ask your friends and peers to also share messages about an issue that is important to them, and remember to tag your MP and political candidates to engage them in the conversation!
 - Keep an eye out for the CFMS/FMEQ Federal Election “Why We Vote” Social Media Campaign – and participate by using the hashtag #IVoteCan and #JeVoteCan!
5. Watch a debate
- Before every federal election there are often debates in your community and across Canada and streamed online. Participate by watching, hosting an election debate watching party, and submitting questions for the debate!
6. Prepare for the federal election day!
- Share on social media that you went out to vote and encourage others to do the same! Track how many students are voting, to share with elected officials the % of CFMS members that voted in the election!
 - Have discussions with your medical school administration and faculty to see if accommodations can be made so that voting is accessible for medical students with a busy academic/clinical schedule.

- Consider how patients in the hospital and how other health professionals can have accessible voting, including exploring if voting stations can be placed in hospital lobbies!

Part 3: How To’s

How to write an email or letter to an elected official

- Writing an email/letter to your MP or a Minister responsible for a particular portfolio that would be best suited to address your concern or issue, is as simple as it sounds!
- Address the letter professionally (i.e. Dear MP/Minister [last name],) and make sure you sign the letter with your name and professional signature.
- Within the body of the text, outline the background on the issue you’d like to explore and share with them, explain how it impacts you or your community, and provide possible recommendations or solutions on means to move forward.
- Ask others to share similar letters to start a larger conversation on the issue, or collect signatures (individuals or organizations) to sign onto your letter to bring forward to a Minister, if the issue affects multiple communities/ridings.
- Depending on the issue discussed, remember to cc’ other relevant Ministers and critics on those portfolios from other political parties.
- Make sure to also follow-up on your letter to ensure you get a reply! It is sometimes daunting to know how long to wait before sending a follow up. We’d recommend giving the MP office 1-2 weeks to respond. Remember that it is their job to respond to constituents, so don’t be afraid to be respectfully persistent!
- Remember that you don’t need to put a stamp on the envelope if you are writing a letter to your MP at their office on Parliament Hill. Their address can be found here:
 - <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>
 - What to address the letter to, and to put on the envelope:
 - [Name of MP]
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada
K1A 0A6

How to learn more about candidates

- On researching candidates and what their priorities and issues they are focusing on, once again use social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.), visit political party websites for party platforms, and useful resources such as www.openparliament.ca for incumbent MPs (useful to find out how they have previously voted, and what statements they’ve previously made).

How to meet with an elected official or candidate

- Be knowledgeable on the issues in your community or affecting you and your peers, medical students, and medical school
- Be prompt, polite, professional, and prepared

- Be responsive and follow-up (i.e. send follow-up emails/letters, keep in touch with their office for additional meetings, attend community townhall events) to build a longitudinal relationship !
- Remember to keep it local and how issues impact community members

How to write a letter to the editor

- Write to national, regional, and/or community newspapers and medical journals to get an opinion out to the public on an issue that matters to you!
- If responding to an article, try to write something in response within 48 hours of the article being published.
- Keep to a concise and clear message, providing new information, opinion, and reflections.

How to have the most impact

- Impact can be measured and achieved in so many different ways.
- If you wanted to share a message or highlight a specific issue, consider reaching out to other partners and local organizations that may have similar viewpoints (i.e. local nurse’s union, local Indigenous groups, homeless shelters, physician networks).
- Speak or attend local rotary club as an opportunity to discuss local issues within a community group. Or attend and speak at local townhalls or events held by elected officials or candidates.
- Have conversations and discussions with friends, family, peers, colleagues! Ask what others think about a particular issue and encourage others to use their voice to go out and vote on election day!

Conclusion

- We hope this is a useful resource for you to engage in the upcoming federal election!
- It is incredibly exciting and inspiring to see all of the work that the CFMS Government Affairs and Advocacy portfolio engages in at the national, provincial, and municipal levels! We are tremendously proud and humbled by the advocacy work that happens year-round, and want to encourage this energy and passion during the lead up to a federal election – as it is an opportune time to highlight health and healthcare issues at the national level!
- Please do not hesitate to reach out the CFMS Government Affairs and Advocacy team and your local Government Affairs and Advocacy Representative should you have additional questions and wanted support to carry through your ideas and work! Visit us here: <https://cfms.org/what-we-do/advocacy/our-team>
- Additional resources and references that helped share this toolkit:
 - Inspire Democracy, Elections Canada: <http://inspirelrademocratie-inspiredemocracy.ca/index-eng.asp>
 - Open Parliament: <https://openparliament.ca/>
 - Message Not Delivered: The Myth of Apathetic Youth and the Importance of Contact in Political Participation: <https://www.samaracanada.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/samara-messagenotdelivered-g.pdf?sfvrsn=2>
 - Youth Electoral Engagement in Canada: <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/part/youeng&document=why&lang=e>
 - National Youth Survey Report: <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/part/ny sr&document=index&lang=e>
 - Youth Voter Turnout in Canada: https://bdp.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/2016104E