

2023-2024

ANNUAL REPORT




ELECTIONS NB
YOUR TRUSTED ELECTION SOURCE

Annual Report 2023-2024

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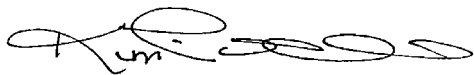
Mr. Shayne Davies
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Legislative Building, Centre Block
P. O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB
E3B 5H1
Canada

Dear Mr. Davies,

I have the honour of presenting the Annual Report of Elections New Brunswick for the period April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024.

I respectfully request that you forward this report to the members of the Legislative Assembly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kimberly A. Poffenroth', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kimberly A. Poffenroth
Chief Electoral Officer

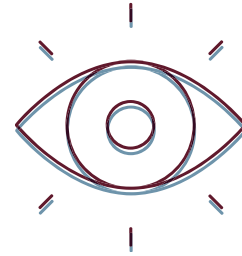
Our Mandate

Elections New Brunswick's mandate is to conduct free and fair elections for New Brunswickers, to facilitate compliance with electoral laws, and to advance public awareness of and confidence in the electoral process.



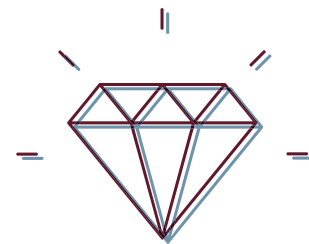
Our Vision

Elections New Brunswick is a trusted organization that supports the democratic process by providing innovative electoral services to all New Brunswickers.



Our Core Values

Our three core values are the deeply ingrained principles that guide all of our actions and influence everything we do. They guide our internal conduct as well as our relationships with our stakeholders. They guide us in fulfilling our mandate and realizing our vision. These values are essential to creating a work environment that supports the execution of our strategy.



Integrity

We work in an honest and trustworthy manner administering transparent and non-partisan electoral processes that adhere to legal and ethical principles.

Innovation

We strive to develop new and better ways to improve our electoral processes and services provided to all New Brunswickers.

Professionalism

Our strength comes from the knowledge, experience and dedication of our staff. Working together, we consistently deliver high-quality electoral products and services.

Organizational Chart

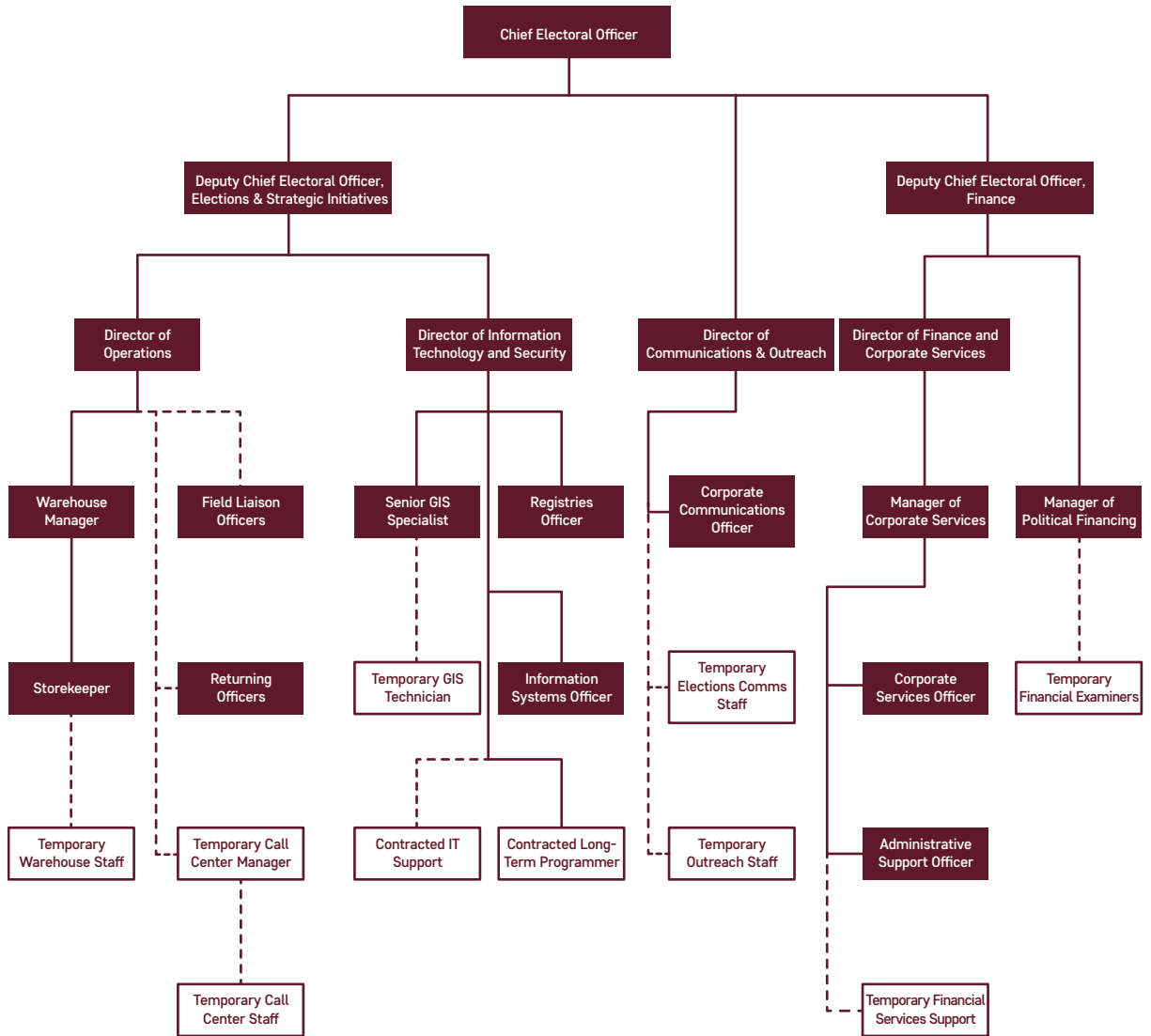


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Message From the Chief Electoral Officer

Elections New Brunswick started off this fiscal year clearly focused on preparations for the next provincial general election scheduled for October 21, 2024. Timelines and tasks were identified by staff to achieve an election readiness date of June 30, 2024. Those plans were derailed in the summer and fall of 2023, when speculation surfaced indicating the possibility of an unscheduled provincial general election being called.

One of the biggest challenges presented by the threat of an early election call was the recent redrawing of the boundaries for the province's 49 electoral districts by the Electoral Boundaries and Representation Commission. With the Commission's final report tabled on March 13, 2023, Elections New Brunswick began the monumental task of redesigning 1,700 polling divisions to align with the new boundaries.

Another critical factor impacting our election readiness was that, at the beginning of September, we had not yet hired the provincial returning officers for each of the 49 electoral districts. Returning officers are essential election officials who are responsible for administering the elections in each of the electoral districts. In fact, when speculation of an early election call began to surface, we were in the middle of the recruitment process for these positions, with the competition only closing on September 15, 2023.

The actions Elections New Brunswick undertook to ensure we were election-ready if a provincial general election were called in the fall of 2023 resulted in significant expenditures that had not been budgeted in this fiscal year. In preparation for the real possibility that such an election would be called, Elections New Brunswick incurred \$1.7 million in costs that will be incurred again for the scheduled provincial general election in October 2024.

In addition, we incurred an additional \$1.5 million in expenses that were to be budgeted in fiscal 2024-2025 but were incurred in this fiscal year. These expenses were simply incurred ahead of schedule and will not be reincurred in preparation for the 2024 provincial general election.



The speculation that there would be an early election call was finally put to rest by the Premier in early November 2023, when he publicly confirmed there would be no election in 2023.

As committed to in last year's annual report, Elections New Brunswick tabled our updated *Strategic Plan 2018-2027 2.0* with the Legislative Assembly in April 2023. The revised plan carried over goals we had not yet achieved from the original plan, and introduced new goals identified following an internal staff review, with which we were assisted by an outside facilitator. After the update of the strategic plan was completed, Elections New Brunswick engaged the services of a team from the Project Advisory Services unit at Finance and Treasury Board to help us develop a plan for prioritizing and implementing the goals articulated in the updated plan.

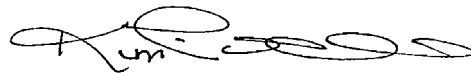
Integrity in the delivery of transparent and nonpartisan electoral processes is one of the core values articulated in our strategic plan. Election management bodies across Canada, including Elections New Brunswick, have been engaged in conversations about the growing trend of targeting the organizations that administer elections when one is unhappy with the outcome of an election. Discussions took place at the national level regarding steps that could be taken to head off unfounded attempts to discredit election management bodies.

Elections New Brunswick decided that the time to act was now. In August 2023, Elections New Brunswick requested bids from marketing agencies to work with our Communications and Outreach Section to create informational videos intended to educate the public on our electoral processes and position and promote Elections New Brunswick as their trusted source for election information.

In November 2023, Loogaroo, a New Brunswick-based creative company, began the work of designing the first five videos based on topics and scripts written and developed by our staff. The delivery of the finished products was expected in May 2024.

The pressures faced by the staff of Elections New Brunswick this past fiscal year with the prospect of having to deliver an unscheduled provincial general election a year sooner than planned, and the professionalism, skill, and collegiality with which they met and overcame each challenge, only elevates the pride I have in our team. For me, what is most inspiring about this impressive group of dedicated professionals is not only that they successfully navigated the challenges of 2023, but they did so while maintaining their good humour and camaraderie and supported each other without question. My deepest thanks to each one of them!

I am always impressed with and thankful for the dedication of the staff with whom I have had the good fortune of working at Elections New Brunswick. This year saw our former GIS Manager, Martin Tremblay, retire after 21 years with the organization, as well as our former Manager of Corporate Services, Theresa Comeau, after 26 years of service. We also presented a Long Service Recognition award to Michelle Turcotte for her 20 years working with Elections New Brunswick.



Kimberly A. Poffenroth
Chief Electoral Officer

Overview

As referenced in the Chief Electoral Officer's message, a large portion of fiscal year 2023-2024 was focused on preparing for the general election scheduled for October 21, 2024, and the escalation of preparations precipitated by speculation in the summer and fall of 2023 that the election would be called earlier than the scheduled date.

As also referenced in her message, the establishment of 49 new electoral district boundaries by the Electoral Boundaries and Representation Commission placed significant work on our Geography Unit. This included regrouping 1,700 polling divisions into clusters for both advance and ordinary polls and identifying to which polling stations each elector would be directed at the election. The eventual end to the speculation of an early election provided more time for the Geography Unit to fine-tune the clusters after additional consultations with our returning officers.

Elections New Brunswick administered three provincial by-elections in April 2023 and 19 local government by-elections in October 2023. Details on these events are provided later in the "Electoral Activities" section.

Despite preparing for and administering all of these electoral events, Elections New Brunswick managed to move forward on some of the actions identified in the revised goals of our *Strategic Plan 2.0*. These are reported later in this report in the "Activities Related to Strategic Goals" section.

In February 2024, Elections New Brunswick held its second annual general meeting. Employees travelled to Miramichi for the three-day meeting, and local returning office staff were invited to attend a few of the sessions held during the meeting. Activities included hosting three guest speakers (including an inspirational presentation by a member of our staff), professional development sessions, strategic planning exercises, team-building activities, and our annual service recognition dinner. This new annual event has quickly proven to be an important team-building exercise for the organization.





Who We Are

Elections New Brunswick is the election management body responsible for the administration of provincial and local government general elections, by-elections and plebiscites. We also administer district education council elections and, until June 16, 2023, regional health authority board elections.

The Chief Electoral Officer administers these elections to ensure they are fair and free of political influence in accordance with the *Elections Act*. In New Brunswick, the Chief Electoral Officer also holds the positions of Supervisor of Political Financing and Municipal Electoral Officer, overseeing compliance with the *Political Process Financing Act* and the *Municipal Elections Act*. As an officer of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, the Chief Electoral Officer must be non-partisan and may not vote in any election for which she is responsible.

Elections New Brunswick has a full-time staffing complement of 17, including the Chief Electoral Officer, and an additional four term positions. The corporate office is located in Fredericton. The Chief Electoral Officer is supported in fulfilling her legislated duties by two Deputy Chief Electoral Officers. One is responsible for overseeing the electoral processes and strategic initiatives, while the other is responsible for overseeing all matters related to corporate services and political financing.

Financial Summary

Elections New Brunswick's annual budget is approved by the Legislative Administration Committee (LAC) of the Legislative Assembly. As provided in Main Estimates for the fiscal year 2023-2024, Elections New Brunswick received funding of \$5,867,000.

Expenditures for the 2023-2024 fiscal year exceeded Elections New Brunswick's approved funding due to unanticipated expenses incurred preparing for the possibility of an early provincial general election call in October 2023.

An overview of our budget, expenditures, and surplus or deficit by financial program is presented in the following table and explanatory notes:

Program	Budget	Expenditures	Surplus (Deficit)	Notes
Administration and Coordination				
Administration	2,126,000	1,966,154	159,846	(1)
Annual Payments to Political Parties	668,000	667,998	2	(2)
	2,794,000	2,634,152	159,848	
Infrastructure				
Elections Infrastructure	1,238,000	2,894,994	(1,656,994)	(3)
	1,238,000	2,894,994	(1,656,994)	
Municipal Elections				
Nov 2022 Local Government Elections	-	(135,131)	135,131	(4)
Oct 2023 Local Government By-Elections	500,000	534,901	(34,901)	(5)
May 2024 Local Government By-Elections	60,000	58,350	1,650	(6)
	560,000	458,120	101,880	
Provincial Elections				
Prior Provincial Electoral Events	-	284	(284)	(7)
Apr 2023 Provincial By-Elections 3, 5 & 17, Direct Costs	500,000	344,713	155,287	(8)
Apr 2023 Provincial By-Elections 3, 5 & 17, Candidates' Reimbursements of Election Expenses	125,000	104,369	20,631	(9)
2023 or 2024 Potential Provincial General Elections	650,000	2,502,396	(1,852,396)	(10)
	1,275,000	2,951,762	(1,676,762)	
Total	5,867,000	8,939,028	(3,072,028)	

- 1 The Administration program reflects the cost to operate the head office and warehouse of Elections New Brunswick.
- 2 An appropriation is authorized annually by the Legislature for annual payments to political parties (*Political Process Financing Act*, s.32). This funding supports the operations of provincially-registered political parties and reimburses their annual audit fees up to a maximum amount calculated under the Act.
- 3 Elections infrastructure is used for both local government and provincial elections and includes equipment that must be maintained between elections, such as tabulation machines, personal computers and tablets. Due to public speculation that an unscheduled provincial general election might be called, Elections New Brunswick incurred significant expenditures that would normally have been incurred in the 2024-25 fiscal year for the October 2024 scheduled provincial general election. These early expenditures totaled over \$1.5 million and included: laptops and licences; tablets and vendor support; tabulation machines, cases and modems; casual warehouse staff; communications products; and support for the CIVIX student vote program.
- 4 Direct costs for data used by voter strike-off tablets and tabulation machines were overcharged by Bell Aliant for the November 2022 local government elections. Elections New Brunswick obtained a refund of these costs, resulting in the reported credit to expenditures.
- 5 Local government by-elections were held in October 2023. Direct costs of \$534,901 were slightly higher than the budget of \$500,000.
- 6 Funding of \$60,000 was provided to prepare for local government by-elections to be held in spring 2024. Direct costs were slightly less at \$58,350.
- 7 Four minor transactions related to prior provincial electoral events.
- 8 Provincial by-elections were held on April 24, 2023, in the electoral districts of Restigouche-Chaleur, Bathurst East-Nepisiguit-Saint-Isidore and Dieppe. The total cost to administer the by-elections over two fiscal years was \$458,745.
- 9 Total reimbursements for the election expenses of eligible candidates in the 2023 by-elections were 83% of the funding received.
- 10 \$650,000 in funding was provided for preparing and printing written materials for use in the October 2024 scheduled provincial general election. The speculation regarding a potential election call, required Elections New Brunswick to incur costs of \$2.5 million to prepare for these potential elections.



Electoral Events

Provincial By-Elections

Writs of Election were issued on March 23, 2023, for by-elections to fill vacancies in three provincial electoral districts: Bathurst East-Nepisiguit-Saint-Isidore; Dieppe and Restigouche-Chaleur. The three seats had been vacant since the fall of 2022. Election Day was Monday, April 24, 2023.

A combined total of 32,974 electors were eligible to vote in the three electoral districts. At the close of polls on Monday, April 24, 2023, a total of 12,359 ballots had been cast, representing a voter participation rate of 37.48%.

These three provincial by-elections marked the first provincial elections for which the Chief Electoral Officer was responsible for hiring returning officers after government changed the *Elections Act* to give this office the authority for such appointments.

Local Government By-Elections

In October 2023, by-elections were scheduled to fill 19 vacancies on 12 local government councils. At the close of nominations, on September 29, 2023, there were enough candidates to hold elections in the following communities: Beaurivage (Councillor at large, Councillor Ward 6); Fredericton Junction (Mayor); Grand Manan (2 councillors at large); Hanwell (Councillor at large, Councillor Ward 4); Neguac (Councillor at large); Riverview (Councillor at large); Southern Victoria (Councillor, Ward 2); Sunbury-York South (Councillor, Ward 1); Tracy (2 Councillors at large).

Candidates were elected by acclamation in the following communities: Beaurivage (Councillor Ward 2); Hanwell (Councillor, Ward 5); Upper Miramichi (Councillor Ward 1, Councillor Ward 3).

Voter turnout ranged from a low of 8.27% for the council position in Sunbury-York South, to a high of 53.97% in Grand Lake.

One council vacancy for Campobello Island remained following the close of nominations. An election for that position will be scheduled along with any other vacancies that are certified before the next set of local government by-elections in May 2024.

Provincial General Elections

As referenced in the message of the Chief Electoral Officer, Elections New Brunswick spent several months in the summer and fall of 2023 responding to speculation that an unscheduled provincial election would be called in October or November of that year. This left Elections New Brunswick with no alternative but to accelerate preparations in order to be ready to administer an unscheduled provincial general election.



Finance and Corporate Services

Reporting to the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Finance, the Finance and Corporate Services Section consists of four permanent employees.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services oversees the day-to-day operation of corporate services, including budgeting, accounting, procurement, accounts payable and payroll.

In May 2023, the Manager of Corporate Services position was left vacant with the retirement of a long-serving member of the Elections New Brunswick family. The duties of the Manager of Corporate Services were divided amongst the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, the Corporate Services Officer, and the Administrative Support Officer while the Director of Finance and Corporate Services undertook an evaluation of the section's staffing requirements.

In fiscal 2023-2024, the Corporate Services Unit continued the transition to the new government-wide enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.

Political Financing

Reporting to the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Finance, the Political Financing Unit consists of one permanent employee and three term employees. The term employees were hired to assist the unit in preparation for the flood of electoral returns that will be filed as part of the 2024 provincial general election and to help clear up outstanding financial returns awaiting examination.

Three of the province's five registered political parties began the transition to register new district associations in preparation for the 2024 provincial general election which, as previously mentioned, will be conducted under 49 new electoral districts. Every registered district association – both old and new – is required to file an annual financial return. This will result in nearly double the number of returns to be examined by the staff of the Political Financing Unit.

Staff also examined the financial returns of nomination contestants, candidates and political parties that participated in provincial by-elections held in April 2023 in the electoral districts of Bathurst East-Nepisiguit-Saint-Isidore, Dieppe and Restigouche-Chaleur.

Finally, annual financial returns of registered political parties and registered district associations continue to be examined in the ordinary course of business.

Information Technology and Security

The Information Technology and Security Section is responsible for the development, implementation and maintenance of technology and other automated information systems and data bases at our head office and in returning offices, during elections.

The Director of Information Technology and Security oversees all matters related to deployment, installation, testing and support of communications equipment, computer hardware, software and other technologies.

A few changes were made to the Information Technology and Security Section during 2023-2024:

- The director's title changed from Director of Information Systems and Technology to Director of Information Technology and Security to better represent the director's role and responsibilities regarding cybersecurity.
- The Hardware Technician's title was changed to Information Systems Officer to better represent the role and responsibilities of the position.
- Following the retirement of the GIS Manager, an employee who was a contracted GIS Technician last year was hired as a full-time Senior GIS Specialist.

Reporting to the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Elections and Strategic Initiatives, the Information Technology and Security Section is comprised of three permanent employees and one contracted staff member.

Registries Officer

Reporting to the Director of Information Technology and Security, the Registries Officer manages the New Brunswick Voter Information System (NBVIS). NBVIS is a database system containing the name, gender, civic address and mailing address of all registered electors in New Brunswick. In accordance with the *Elections Act* and the *Municipal Elections Act*, the Registries Officer uses the information in the registry of electors to create lists of electors at the beginning of each electoral event that are required to enable voting and are used by candidates for campaigning purposes.

Information Systems Officer

Reporting to the Director of Information Technology and Security, the Information Systems Officer is responsible for the maintenance, repair and upgrading of all IT systems and hardware used by Elections New Brunswick. This includes desktop computers, 500 laptops, 200 printers, 1200 iPads and their peripherals as well as all the other devices used to run elections.

Geography

Reporting to the Director of Information Technology and Security, the Geography Unit consists of the Senior GIS Specialist, with support from the Operations Officer. The unit is responsible for ensuring that every civic address that falls within the boundaries of an electoral district or local government is correctly associated to a polling division, placed into both advance and ordinary poll clusters, and then assigned to a polling station. This data then feeds NBVIS, which allows Elections New Brunswick to send voter information cards to electors to inform them of the locations where they are eligible to vote.

Activity Highlights

- Elections New Brunswick is required by legislation to annually provide the lists of electors to the registered political parties. Elections New Brunswick worked with a vendor to build a web-based portal to securely share the lists of electors with the registered political parties. Voter information can now only be downloaded by a user who has access to a security token. This token expires after 90 days and cannot be used again. Multi-factor authentication was also implemented to use the portal; a user cannot open the file without contacting Elections New Brunswick to first request their password. The web-based platform is secured using SSL (HTTPS) and SHA-256 with RSA encryption. The platform, called the MLA Portal, was implemented and used for the first time in March 2024.
- Five hundred new laptops with hard drive encryption and Trusted Platform Module (TPM) were purchased to safeguard sensitive information through encrypted storage and enhanced authentication protocols to protect against cyber threats and to prepare for the deployment of Windows 11 in 2025.
- Additional Poll Pads and tabulation machines were purchased in preparation for the 2024 provincial general election. Secure charging cabinets to house over 1,200 Poll Pads were purchased to store and secure the Poll Pads in the warehouse. While charging, the Poll Pads can be managed using a mobile device management system.
- Elections New Brunswick provided an iPad and a government email account to each municipal and provincial returning officer to maintain communication between elections.
- In 2018, a temporary solution was implemented to schedule and pay poll workers and polling stations. In 2023-2024, NBVIS was updated to integrate this functionality, avoiding the need to maintain separate IT systems. Extensive testing occurred in fall 2023, and the modifications were deployed in March 2024, in time to be used in the spring local government by-elections.
- Following the March 2023 report of the Electoral Boundaries and Representation Commission, the Senior GIS Specialist reviewed and redesigned the polling divisions and clusters for all of New Brunswick's 49 electoral districts. A first draft was prepared in time for a potential unscheduled provincial general election in October 2023. Geography training sessions were held with returning officers in March and April 2024. Based on the feedback of returning officers provided at those sessions, revisions were made to better accommodate local communities of interest in the electoral districts.

Operations

With the guidance of senior management, the Director of Operations oversees procurement and warehousing activities for Elections New Brunswick. The Director of Operations also coordinates the delivery of training programs to returning officers and the day-to-day conduct of electoral events.

Speculation that the provincial general election would be called a year early resulted in training manuals, materials and forms being sent for printing well ahead of schedule. Technology purchases of tabulation machines, Poll Pads and laptop computers were accelerated to ensure Elections New Brunswick would be election-ready.

Reporting to the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Elections and Strategic Initiatives, the Operations Section is comprised of three permanent employees and one term employee.

Communications and Outreach

The Communications and Outreach Section oversees the development, design and deployment of all communication materials used to educate the public and to promote all election-related activities of the organization.

This includes supporting outreach activities undertaken throughout the year to engage targeted groups of electors, including individuals from the disability community, seniors, students, and other disparate individuals.

In fiscal year 2023-2024, the Communications and Outreach Section took the lead in organizing the founding meeting of the Consultation Committee on Election Accessibility. This permanent group, created by the Chief Electoral Officer, is a forum meant to facilitate ongoing sharing of information between Elections New Brunswick and organizations representing electors who may require support in accessing or navigating the electoral process. It held its inaugural meeting on May 18, 2023.

The Communications and Outreach Section consists of two permanent employees.

Activities Related to Strategic Goals

In April 2023, we tabled our updated *Strategic Plan 2018-2027 2.0* with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. The revised plan incorporated new goals and actions that will be worked on for its remaining four years.

The number of goals in our updated plan decreased from six to five. Feedback received by staff during the review concluded that the outstanding actions identified in the goal to increase employee satisfaction were intrinsically connected to the goals to improve workplace efficiency and effectiveness and increase organizational resilience.

The distraction of a possible early election call in 2023 forced us to move to the back burner some of the action items on which we had hoped to make additional progress.

1. Encourage voter engagement

- On May 18, 2023, the inaugural meeting of the Consultation Committee on Election Accessibility was held at Elections New Brunswick head office. Representatives from eight of the nine external agencies invited to sit on the committee took part in the day-long meeting. The introductory meeting was used to set out the intent of the committee and to exchange ideas.

It will serve as a forum to facilitate ongoing sharing of information between Elections New Brunswick and organizations representing electors who may require supports in accessing or navigating the electoral process.

- In May 2023, the Chief Electoral Officer wrote a letter to the chiefs of New Brunswick's sixteen First Nations, along with the Aboriginal People's Council, inviting them to participate on a First Nations Consultation Committee on Election Processes she intended to create. The intention was to engage the leaders of the province's indigenous communities to determine ways for Elections New Brunswick to effectively communicate with their communities on the elections that we are responsible for administering. Unfortunately, except for a call from the Aboriginal People's Council, we did not hear back from any of the chiefs. We will continue to explore other avenues to initiate a dialogue with the First Nation leaders.
- In April 2023, Elections New Brunswick initiated a wholesale review of its website. Working with the Digital Transformation Team (DTT) at Finance and Treasury Board, the objective was to improve the overall user experience and enhance accessibility to the large volume of material available on the website. Working within the limitations of the existing web platform, the team reviewed analytics of traffic from previous electoral events to determine the information and links most often visited. They also offered advice on the language level being used for much of the content on our website, which was viewed as too high. Our website project was delayed as we dealt with the rumours of a potential early election call; however, we maintained our target of refreshing the website prior to the October 2024 provincial general election.

- In November 2023, the Miramichi-based company Loogaroo was selected to lead the creation and design of five videos to educate electors on our processes and the safeguards put in place to protect elections. As mentioned earlier in the message from the Chief Electoral Officer, the goal of these dynamic digital ads is to pre-bunk attempts to raise doubts in the public about the integrity of the outcome of elections administered by Elections New Brunswick and to highlight that Elections New Brunswick is the trusted source of information for anything election related.

The first series of digital ads was completed in late May 2024, and were on the following topics:

- i. How to vote
- ii. Results reporting
- iii. Tabulation machines
- iv. Voter eligibility
- v. Voting methods

2. Improve services to participants in the political process

- With the next provincial general election scheduled for October 21, 2024, it was determined that Elections New Brunswick would organize a training session in the spring of 2024 for representatives from the registered political parties. The purpose of the session is to offer high-level information on electoral procedures impacting parties and candidates and on the important rules related to political financing. In planning for the event, it was decided that, in addition to being an in-person event, the session would also be live-streamed to allow for greater participation from other party representatives in the 49 ridings. The date of April 24, 2024, was selected for the Elections 101 session.

- Each year, Elections New Brunswick is legislatively required to share the list of electors with the registered political parties and members of the Legislative Assembly. Elections New Brunswick implemented a web-based portal to securely share this information. The list of electors can now only be downloaded by a user that has access to a security token, which replaces the old process of sending encrypted files by USB drive. It was implemented and used for the first time in March 2024.

3. Increase efficiency and effectiveness of electoral processes

- In preparation for the 2024 scheduled provincial general election, an online application and review process was held from June to September to recruit and hire the required 49 provincial returning officers. Returning officers were identified and immediately began abbreviated training in early October due to rumours of an unscheduled provincial general election.
- In anticipation of the significant volume of financial returns to be filed and examined following the upcoming provincial general election, two additional accountants were hired on term contracts in January 2024 to provide for an adequate period of training and hands-on experience with financial examinations.
- Elections New Brunswick continues to pursue additional legislative amendments to modernize its electoral legislation (*Elections Act*, *Political Process Financing Act*, *Municipal Elections Act*). A Memorandum to Executive Council (MEC) was presented, highlighting the more urgent changes required, including giving the Chief Electoral Officer the discretionary powers to modify provisions of the *Elections Act* during a state of emergency or a state of local emergency. The MEC did not move forward, and the status quo remains.

- As referenced earlier in this report, NBVIS was updated to include poll worker and polling station scheduling and payment functionality in order to more efficiently manage and pay the thousands of poll workers and hundreds of polling stations needed in a general election. Internal processes to review and export this data into the government's payment system were reviewed and modified to remove 'non-value add' steps.
- A polling station assessment application was developed for use by the provincial returning officers to evaluate the appropriateness of locations being considered as polling stations in the upcoming provincial general election. The application is installed on an iPad and allows the returning officers to visit potential locations, assess accessibility criteria, and save the information to a centralized GIS-based database for later use.

4. Improve workplace efficiency and effectiveness

- In June 2023, the Chief Electoral Officer established a Human Resource Policy Committee at Elections New Brunswick. The committee is comprised of the Chief Electoral Officer, the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, the acting Manager of Corporate Services and the Administrative Support Officer. The mandate of the group is to review and update existing policies, to identify potential gaps that exist, and to make policy recommendations to Senior Management.
- In February 2024, staff of Elections New Brunswick met for its second annual general meeting, which included a session to further break out specific actions to best achieve our various strategic goals.
- New onboarding and orientation procedures were developed and formally documented to be used when new staff are hired at head office.

5. Increase Organizational Resilience

- As referenced earlier in the section on increasing efficiency and effectiveness of electoral processes, Elections New Brunswick attempted to seek legislative changes that would allow it to respond to unanticipated local emergencies that might impact electoral activities. Those did not move forward. It is our intent to continue seeking these provisions.
- A number of staffing changes and new hires have helped to increase our operational capacity and flexibility. These moves also build on a yet-to-be adopted succession plan for the organization.
- In December 2023, Elections New Brunswick initiated the process to have all full-time staff at head office screened for a high-level security clearance. The process, led by the Office of the Provincial Security Advisor (OPSA), is intended to further enhance the security of New Brunswick elections and assure the public of the safeguards in place to protect sensitive elector information and critical election infrastructure.
- The Director of Information Technology and Security participates in regular briefings by the Canadian Center for Cyber Security (CCCS). At Elections New Brunswick's annual general meeting in February 2024, CCCS delivered a presentation that included a high-level overview of the cyber threats to Canada's democratic process, including foreign interference in elections, methods for identifying misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, and services that they offer. Elections New Brunswick plans to have CCCS deliver a similar presentation to the political parties at the Elections 101 training in April 2024.

Looking Forward

As we close the book on another year, staff at Elections New Brunswick continue to focus on the outstanding tasks to be completed as we prepare for the provincial general election scheduled for October 21, 2024.

Returning office staff, who received accelerated training in October 2023, were scheduled to receive additional training during the months of March and April 2024. The focus of this training was hands-on learning with, and practical exercises related to, the systems and software they will use to administer the elections in their respective electoral districts in September and October 2024.

The staff of Elections New Brunswick are hopeful that the work we did in 2023 to prepare for the possibility of an unscheduled provincial general election will leave us with unanticipated flexibility in our 2024-2025 schedule to make progress on some of the goals that we committed to in our updated *2018-2027 Strategic Plan*.

The environment in which elections are conducted are ever-changing. Globally, both those participating in and those administering elections are increasingly concerned with foreign interference in elections, the increase in misinformation and disinformation in the public space, and the potential negative uses of generative AI in political campaigning and influence activities. As Elections New Brunswick considers how best to pursue the goals of our strategic plan, we must have this changing landscape front of mind and evolve our strategic actions accordingly.

