



Introduction:

Making the most of elections in your organization

Every year, hundreds of thousands of Canadians cast votes to elect the boards, councils and other governing bodies for their community groups, co-ops, unions, student councils, professional associations and other organizations.

Typically organizations are using voting systems set up long ago or, in some cases, have changed or modified them without an awareness of the full range of alternatives available.

As a result, many organizations have electoral systems that can actually work against the group's own principles and objectives.

Why do voting systems matter?

The people elected to serve on a board of directors or other governing bodies have important roles and responsibilities.

They are empowered to make significant decisions with financial, social and sometimes political consequences for members, supporters and other stakeholders.

The decision on *how* people are elected can change *who* is elected. For example, many voting systems:

- *can leave the majority unrepresented rather than ensuring all voters have equal and effective votes*
- *concentrate power in the hands of one person or officers rather than distributing power more widely to the full board*
- *discourage newcomers from competing as candidates*

- *make it difficult or impossible for minorities to gain fair representation rather than providing balanced representation for all*
- *allow a well organized minority to capture every seat and have complete control of the organization rather than making sure power is equal to a group's true popularity*
- *be expected to guarantee representation for certain groups but inadvertently work against the interest of people in those groups*

The good news – democratic governments and civil society groups around the world have developed a wide range of voting systems from which to choose.

The bad news – among developed Western countries, Canada lags far behind in the use of modern democratic voting systems.

What is Fair Vote Canada?

Founded in 2001, Fair Vote Canada is a national multi-partisan citizens' campaign for voting reform.

FVC promotes the use of fair voting systems for electing all levels of government and for use throughout civil society.

Fair Vote Canada members come from all walks of life, all parts of the country and all points on the political spectrum – but share a common belief that fair voting systems are a fundamental democratic requirement.

What is the FVC Civil Society Elections Program?

The Civil Society Elections Program is a support service for those who wish to examine the current voting system used in their organizations and determine if the system addresses the principles and objectives of the organization.

FVC representatives can assist organizations in reviewing their election process and system, clarify objectives and principles, and when appropriate, recommend alternative voting systems for your consideration.

If you are interested in learning more about fair voting for your organization, please contact us at:

Fair Vote Canada

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