

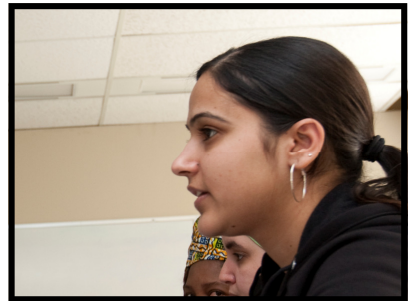
Civic Engagement for Immigrant Women



Volunteering in
the Community



Your Rights and
Responsibilities to
Vote



Voicing your
Concerns

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association





This civic engagement handbook is produced by Calgary Immigrant Women's Association for the Calgary immigrant women population. It has also been translated into five other languages – Arabic, Farsi, French, Mandarin and Spanish.

The handbook can be found and downloaded free of charge from the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association website www.ciwa-online.com. This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part for any non-commercial purpose relating to civic engagement.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.



**Citizenship and
Immigration Canada**

**Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada**

Published September 2011 by
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
#200, 138 – 4th Avenue SE
Calgary, Alberta, Canada
T2G 4Z6



CIWA
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association



What is Civic Engagement?	4
What is in this Handbook?	4
What Does it Mean to be Canadian?	4
Canadian Values	5
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms	5
Canadian Rights and Responsibilities	6
Civic Participation in Canada.....	7
Volunteering in the Community	8
What is Volunteering?	8
What are the Benefits of Volunteering?	8
Where Can I Volunteer?.....	8
What is a Non-Profit Organization?	9
Examples of Non-Profit Organizations.....	9
Examples of Volunteering Opportunities	9
Become a Member of a Board of Directors.....	10
What is a Board of Directors?	10
Getting Involved with your Child's School	10
Become a Parent Volunteer.....	10
Become Part of a School Council	10
Elections and Voting	11
Voting is the Right of all Canadians	11
How Government Works	11
How Canada Became a Country	12
Three Levels of Government in Canada.....	12
Federal Government Structure.....	13
The British Monarch is The Head of State	13
The Prime Minister is the Leader In Government	13
Members of Parliament	13
Provincial Government Structure.....	14
The Members of the Legislative Assembly	14
Municipal Government Structure	15
Calgary City Council	15
Steps for Voting in a Federal Election.....	16
Political Parties	17
What do the Parties do?.....	17
What is Campaigning?	17
The Political Spectrum.....	17
Provincial Political Parties.....	18
Having a Public Voice.....	19
Make a Complaint or State a Concern.....	19
Write a Letter of Complaint or Concern	20
Write to a Government Official.....	21
Write a Letter of Opinion to a Newspaper	21
Speak about a Complaint or Concern.....	22
Lead your Community into Action.....	22
Go to a Public Forum about Concerns in your Town, City or Province	22
Create Change in Your Community	23
References	24



WHAT IS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Civic engagement means people participating in social and political activities within their community and their country.

As a new Canadian, you are now a member of the country and of your local community. You can participate in civic activities on your own or with your family in your local community, or at the city, provincial, or national levels. Taking part in civic activities helps build your community and shape the nation. You also take steps towards social integration and inclusion. As you become an active citizen in your community, your culture, history and values become a part of Canada and Canada becomes a part of you. This kind of civic responsibility creates productive, responsible, caring and contributing members of a society.

WHAT IS IN THIS HANDBOOK?

Civic Engagement for Immigrant Women gives you information on how to become part of your community and become involved in decision-making processes. It includes information on what your rights and responsibilities in Canada are, how to vote, how to contact local government officials, how to join the school council at your child's school, and how to voice your opinion on matters that are important to you. Learning about the importance of volunteering and being involved in civic activities such as voting will help you settle in Canada and become part of the country.

To help you learn, CIWA has translated this handbook into four other languages: **Arabic, Farsi, French, Spanish and Mandarin.**

This handbook covers the three areas of civic participation:

**VOLUNTEERING
IN THE
COMMUNITY**

**ELECTIONS
AND
VOTING**

**HAVING
A PUBLIC
VOICE**

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CANADIAN?

Most Canadians share similar beliefs and values about how they want to live and what their country means to them. Canadians believe in democracy and encourage all citizens to participate in society. All Canadian citizens have equal access to power through participation and voting. Canadian values include freedom, respect for cultural differences and a commitment to social justice. All citizens have certain rights and responsibilities. The rights of Canadians are protected by the law and are based on the belief everyone is entitled to basic human rights. The responsibility of Canadians is to live by the rules of our society and be respectful of the differences between us.



CANADIAN VALUES

• EQUALITY

Canadians respect everyone's rights. All individuals have the right to speak out and express ideas. The government must treat everyone with equal dignity and respect.

• FREEDOM

Canadian citizens enjoy the freedoms of thought, speech, religion and freedom of peaceful assembly.

• LAW AND ORDER

All citizens, including politicians, police, members of government, and the courts must follow the "rule of law". This means no one is above the law and the law treats everyone fairly and equally. This way, our elected governments must be responsible to the people.

• PEACE

Canada is a non-violent society and we have an international role as peacekeepers.

CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is a law of Canada. It protects the individual rights and freedoms of all Canadian citizens. It is an important document. It also protects **YOU**.

- Right to life, liberty and security
- Right to vote and to run in an election
- Right to apply for a passport
- Right to enter, remain in and leave Canada
- Right from unreasonable search and seizure
- Right not to be detained without reason

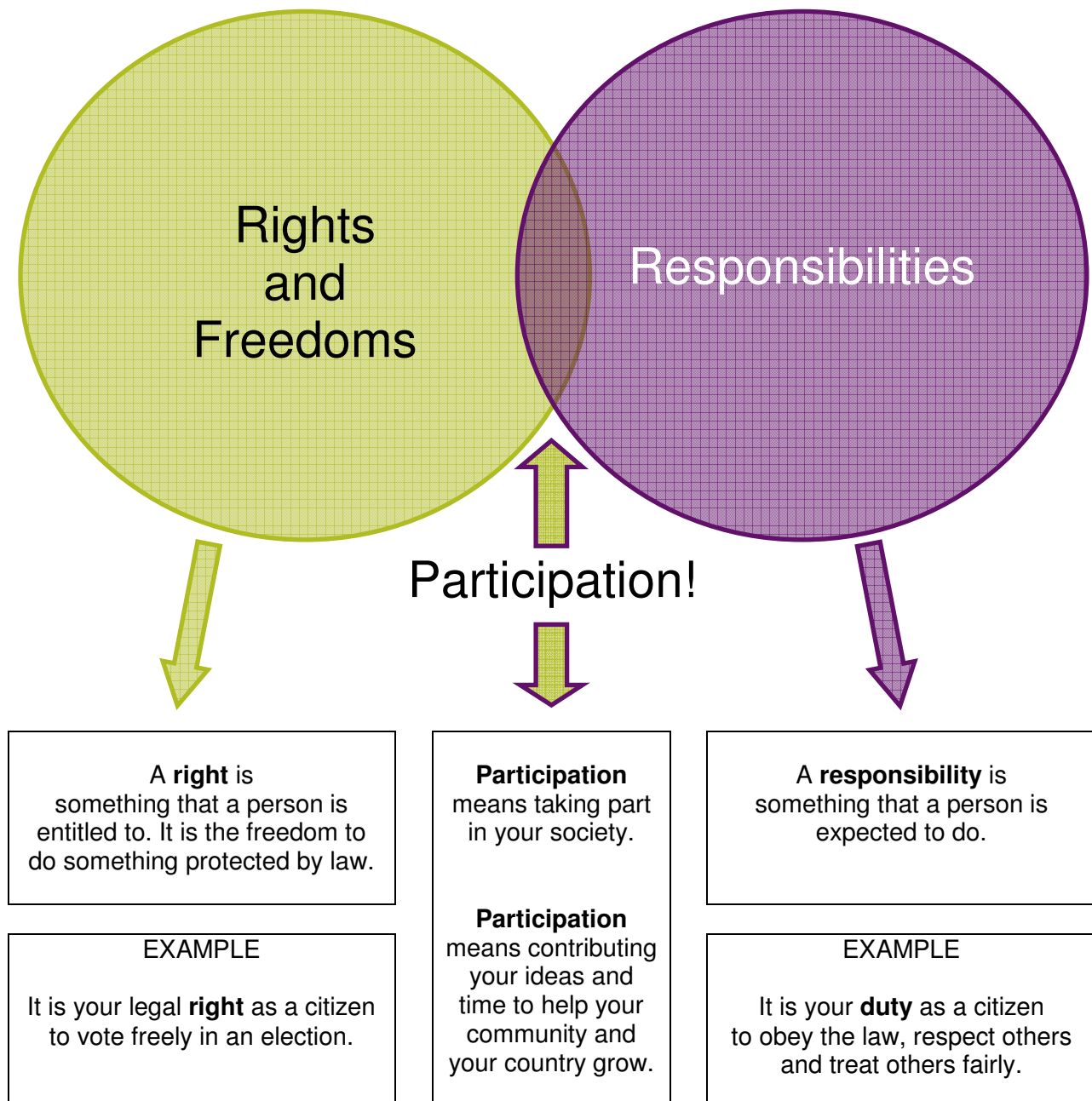
- Freedom of conscience and religion
- Freedom of thought
- Freedom of belief
- Freedom of opinion
- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of peaceful assembly
- Freedom of association

- Right to equal treatment under the law and no discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability



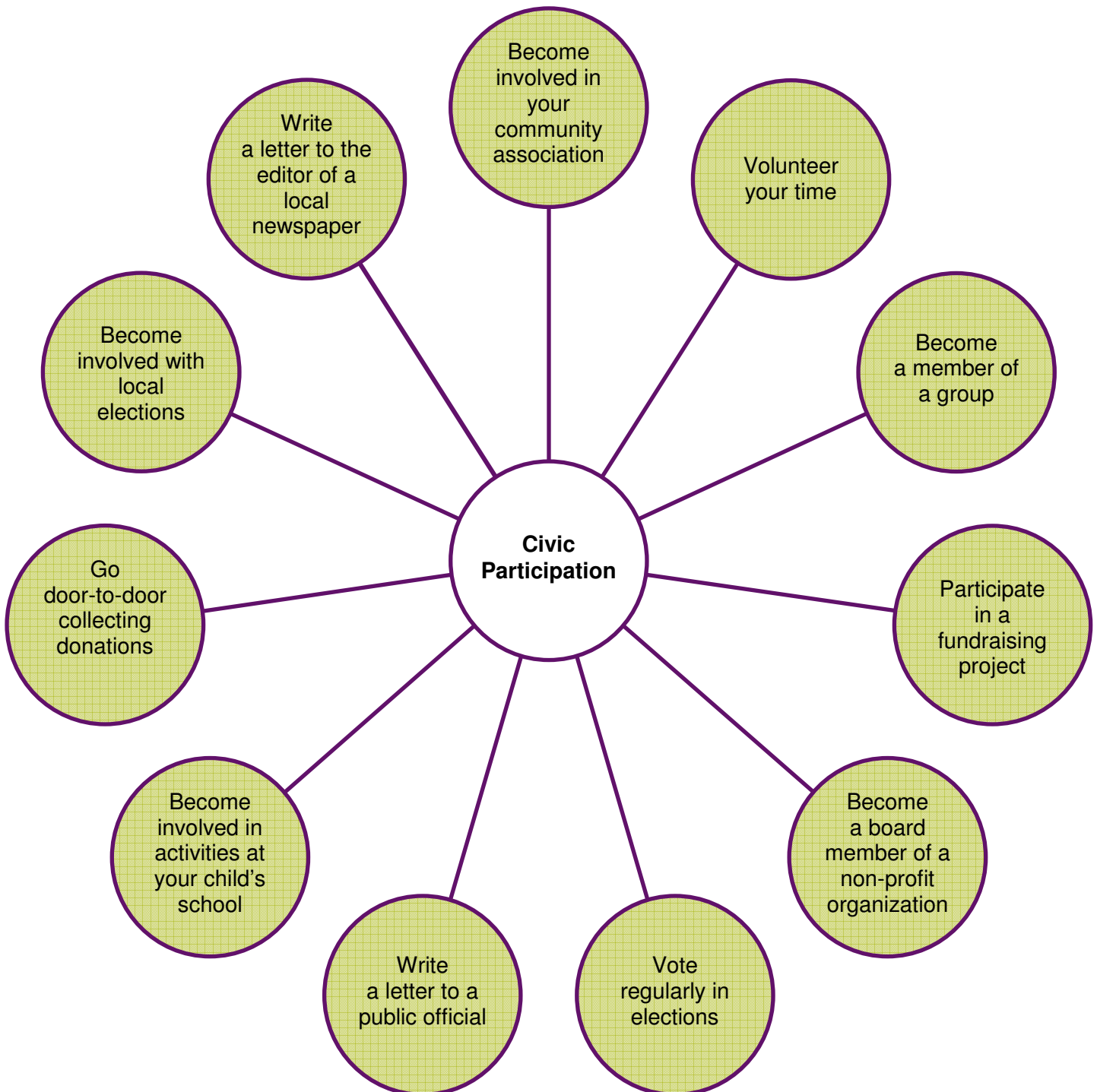
CANADIAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is important to know that all Canadians have rights and responsibilities towards our country. Civic participation also means that you use your rights and your responsibilities as a citizen and resident of your community. Remember that for every right there is usually a matching responsibility.





CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN CANADA





VOLUNTEERING IN THE COMMUNITY

WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING?

Volunteering is the practice of people working on behalf of others without being motivated by financial or personal gain. So a volunteer is a person who helps others without being paid. There are millions of volunteers across Canada and volunteering is seen as a good quality in people. Usually you volunteer to do something for others, promote good, or improve your community.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING?

For many immigrants in Canada, it can be difficult to meet new people and make new friends, especially when English is not your first language. Volunteering is a great way to get out of the house, meet new people and learn about Canadian society. The box below lists some benefits of volunteering:

- Gain confidence in yourself
- Gain knowledge about Canada
- Learn skills that may be related to your work
- Meet new people and make new friends
- Build your social contacts and network
- Be a part of your community
- Express your own ideas and opinions
- Teach Canadian people about your culture
- Feel like you are making a positive difference in your community
- Improve your English skills: practice your speaking and writing skills

WHERE CAN I VOLUNTEER?

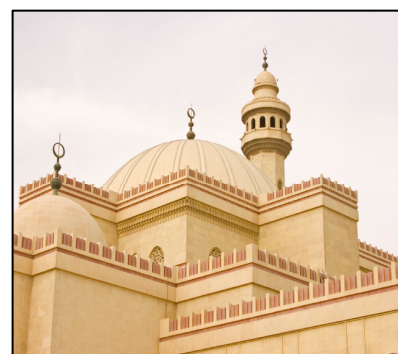
You can volunteer your time at a church, temple, mosque, community centre, local school, or any charity or non-profit organization.



Churches



Schools



Mosques/Temples



WHAT IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION?

A non-profit organization exists for educational, charitable or humanitarian purposes. It is run like a business, and will have members who pay a fee. The goal of non-profits is to support various groups in society and operate community-based projects, programs and activities that help develop community spirit or educate people on a certain topic.

EXAMPLES OF NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

LOCAL/CITY LEVEL

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association helps immigrant women settle in Calgary

Volunteer Calgary gives people in Calgary information on how and where they can volunteer

The Mustard Seed Street Ministry provides support to homeless people in Calgary

NATIONAL LEVEL

Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation educates people about breast cancer, raises money for research, and promotes early diagnosis and effective treatment

Canadian Diabetes Association promotes the health of Canadians and works to eliminate diabetes

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

UNICEF works to protect the rights of children all over the world and help meet their basic needs

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) protects natural areas, plants and animals by promoting the protection of nature and the environment

EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

- Help organize an event
- Help a child with a school subject
- Serve breakfast/lunch/dinner to homeless or less-fortunate people
- Answer the telephone at a non-profit organization
- Do translation or interpretation
- Make follow up phone calls to clients or customers



Feed homeless people



Make follow-up phone calls



Help a child learn to read



BECOME A MEMBER OF A BOARD OF DIRECTORS

WHAT IS A BOARD OF DIRECTORS?

Every non-profit or charitable organization has a Board of Directors that is responsible for overseeing the organization and setting up policies and objectives. The duties of a Board of Directors may include:

- Governing the organization by setting up policies and objectives
- Choosing, hiring, supporting and reviewing the performance of the chief executive
- Ensuring the availability of adequate financial resources
- Approving annual budgets
- Reporting to the public about the organization's performance

Many non-profit organizations are always looking for new board members. If you are interested in the goals and beliefs of a specific non-profit, you can contact them to find out how to become a board member. For more information, check the organization's website, phone or email them.

GETTING INVOLVED WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

Many opportunities exist for parents to get involved with their child's school. You can volunteer to help organize different activities or events, or you can be involved with the school council. Phone your child's school office to find out if you can volunteer with them.

BECOME A PARENT VOLUNTEER

There are many meaningful and enjoyable ways you can help schools. Here are examples:

- Serve fun lunches to students
- Help supervise on field trips
- Coach a school team
- Help with different tasks in the classroom, the library, or the office

- Help supervise at a school dance
- Organize special events for students
- Help with school plays and concerts
- Read with students who need extra support

Schools are very concerned with the safety and security of children. When you volunteer at your child's school, the school will do a background check. The school principal or a teacher may interview you to find out your personality and see if you are a good fit at the school. The school will also ask you to get a police clearance. This is when the local police search your background and history. If you have a police record, the school may not allow you to volunteer with them.

BECOME PART OF A SCHOOL COUNCIL

Many schools in Canada will have a school council, which is a group of people who work together to support students. Usually a school council is made up of parents, teachers, principals, staff and community representatives. They hold regular meetings to give advice and opinions on matters related to academic programs, school policies and school budgeting. Being part of a school council allows parents to be part of the education of their children and make a difference in the school.



ELECTIONS AND VOTING

VOTING IS THE RIGHT OF ALL CANADIANS

When you become a citizen of Canada, you will have a right and responsibility to vote. This right is protected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is a responsibility because all people have a duty to participate in choosing the leaders for their nation. This is how societies develop and governments learn how to run themselves better and more efficiently. This is how we choose the leader of the country, the province or the city.

Voting in Canada happens in secret. This means that you can vote freely for any person running in an election without fear of persecution. In Canada, the police, the military, and government have no right to tell you who to vote for. You cannot be arrested or put in prison for voting in a certain way.

It is important to remember that every vote counts, and as a citizen of Canada, you have the power to vote for the person you think will do the best job. When you vote in Canada, the party with the biggest number (majority) of votes in an election becomes the leading party.

HOW GOVERNMENT WORKS

Canada is a large country with 10 provinces, 3 territories and a population of more than 30 million people. Canada has a federal style of government. This means each province or territory has its own government structure that works with the federal government in Ottawa, Ontario. The relationship between the provincial and the federal governments is based on cooperation and understanding.





HOW CANADA BECAME A COUNTRY

Canada became a country in 1867 when the Queen of England signed the British North America Act. This was a law recognizing Canada as an independent country and giving it a Constitution. A constitution is a set of rules that outlines the structure and principles of the government. These rules describe: who has political authority; the clear division of powers between federal and provincial governments; and the limits of governmental power.

Canada is a Constitutional Monarchy which means our Head of State is a hereditary Monarch from the United Kingdom. The head of government is an elected Prime Minister. Government in Canada follows the principles of parliamentary democracy, including: giving citizens the right to vote in election, having representatives from all regions, and voting by secret ballot. The government answers to citizens and can be changed by the people. Citizens have the freedom to participate in political and social activities that build communities and shape the nation.

THREE LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT IN CANADA

Government makes decisions and laws to meet the needs of Canadians. There are three levels of government in Canada. They all use a democratic process in electing their members, as well as in making and managing rules and laws, but they differ in location, size, and responsibilities.

- 1. Federal Government** → makes laws for the whole country
- 2. Provincial Government** → makes laws for their own province
- 3. Municipal Government** → makes by-laws for their own city or town

Each level of government has different responsibilities. Generally, the federal government takes responsibility for issues that affect all of Canada but shares some responsibilities with provincial governments. The provincial and territorial governments look after more regional matters. The municipal governments look after local matters.

Federal Responsibilities

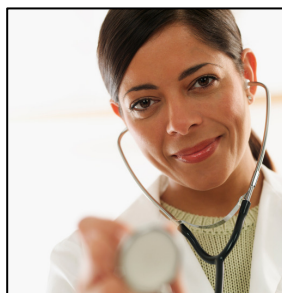
Citizenship and Immigration
Defence and Foreign Policy
Post Office
Money
Employment Insurance (EI)
Canada Pension Plan (CPP)
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
Taxes

Provincial Responsibilities

Health and Education
Licenses
Highways
Prisons
Transportation
Parks
Tourism
Labour
Taxes

Municipal Responsibilities

Garbage and Recycling
Police and Fire Protection
Streets
Housing
Recreation
Public Library
Public Transit
Water and Sewer
Taxes





FEDERAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

Canada is a parliamentary democracy. Parliament has three parts: the Queen, the House of Commons, and the Senate.

THE BRITISH MONARCH IS THE HEAD OF STATE

Currently, the Queen - Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II - is our Head of State. The Queen lives in the United Kingdom and is represented in Canada by the Governor General of Canada and the Lieutenant Governors of each province who perform royal duties on her behalf.

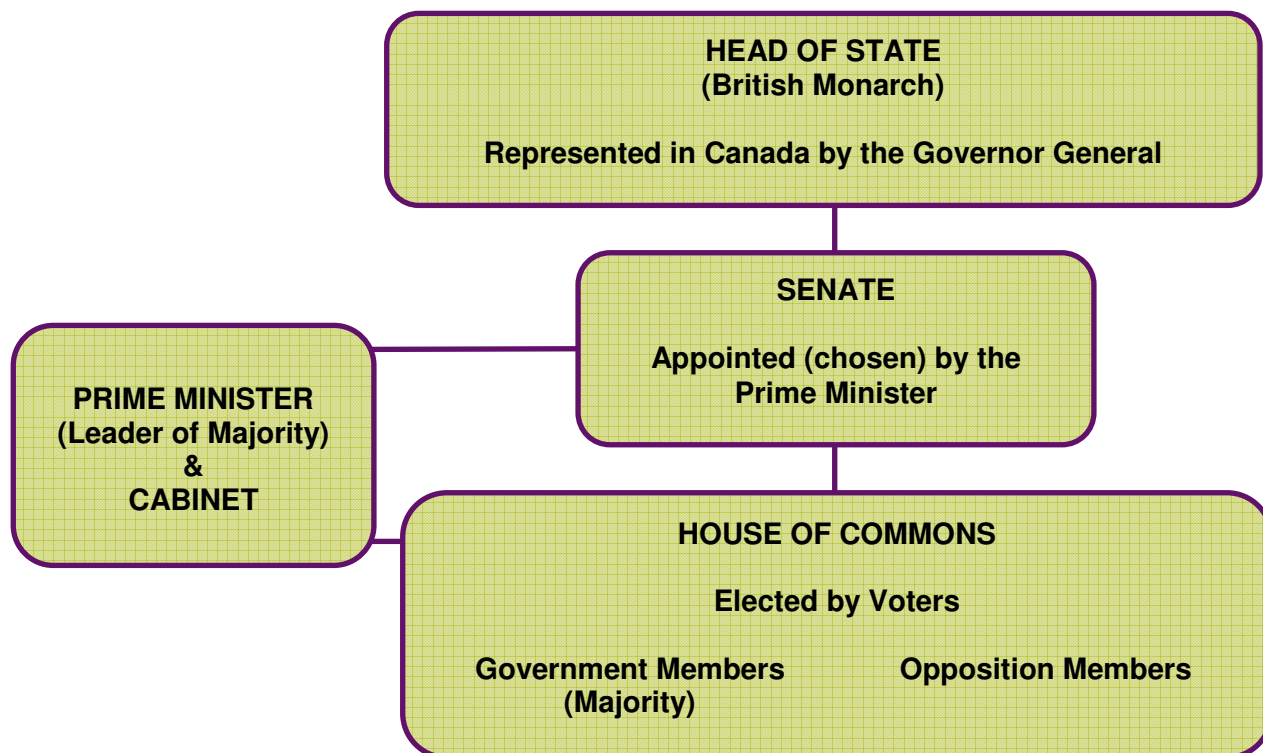
THE PRIME MINISTER IS THE LEADER IN GOVERNMENT

The Prime Minister is the leader of the political party with the most elected members of Parliament sitting in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister chooses Members of Parliament (MP) to give advice and help run the country. These people are called the Cabinet Ministers. They are all given special jobs and are responsible for certain areas. For example, the Minister of Finance takes care of the government's money.

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

The people in the House of Commons are elected by the people of Canada, through elections and voting. They are called Members of Parliament (MP). An MP represents the people who elected him or her. Each MP usually belongs to a political party. After an election, the party that has the most MPs forms the government. The leader of that party then becomes the Prime Minister. The party with the second most MPs elected forms the Official Opposition. Their leader is the Leader of the Opposition. Members from other parties are also opposition members.

The people in the Senate are chosen by the Prime Minister. They are called Senators.





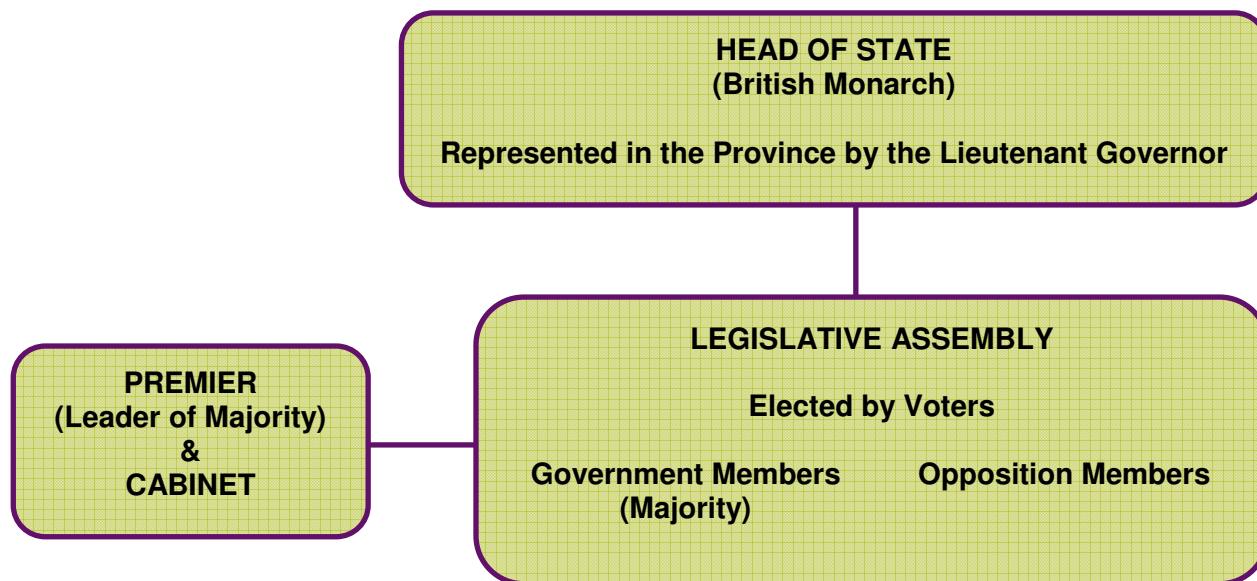
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

Each province may be slightly different from the other, but the basic structure is shown in the chart below. Provincial governments are set up like the federal government except they have no Senate. The Lieutenant Governor represents the Crown (the Queen). Each province has a legislative assembly which is similar to the federal House of Commons.

THE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are elected by the people in the province. Each MLA usually belongs to a political party. After an election, the leader of the party with the biggest number of elected MLAs becomes the Premier of the province. The leader of the party with the second most votes becomes the Leader of the Opposition. The Premier of the province chooses Cabinet Ministers to look after provincial government departments.

MLAs represent all the people where they were elected, whether or not they voted for him or her. MLAs listen to the problems, questions, ideas and opinions of the people who live in the electoral division they represent. In the Legislative Assembly, MLAs share the views of their constituents and debate and discuss concerns with other MLAs. They also deal with organizations and groups who advocate for concerns such as the environment, child care, health care or education. The groups can meet with an MLA in person or write a letter.





MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

Municipal governments are the local governments of cities, towns, villages, and parishes within a province. In a municipal election, citizens will vote for members of the City Council. Usually, the head of the municipal government is the Mayor and other members of this government are council members, councillors or Aldermen. The City Council meets regularly to discuss local issues and make local laws called bylaws. A municipality has independence on most decisions, but the provincial government may change all bylaws passed by a municipal government at any time.

CALGARY CITY COUNCIL

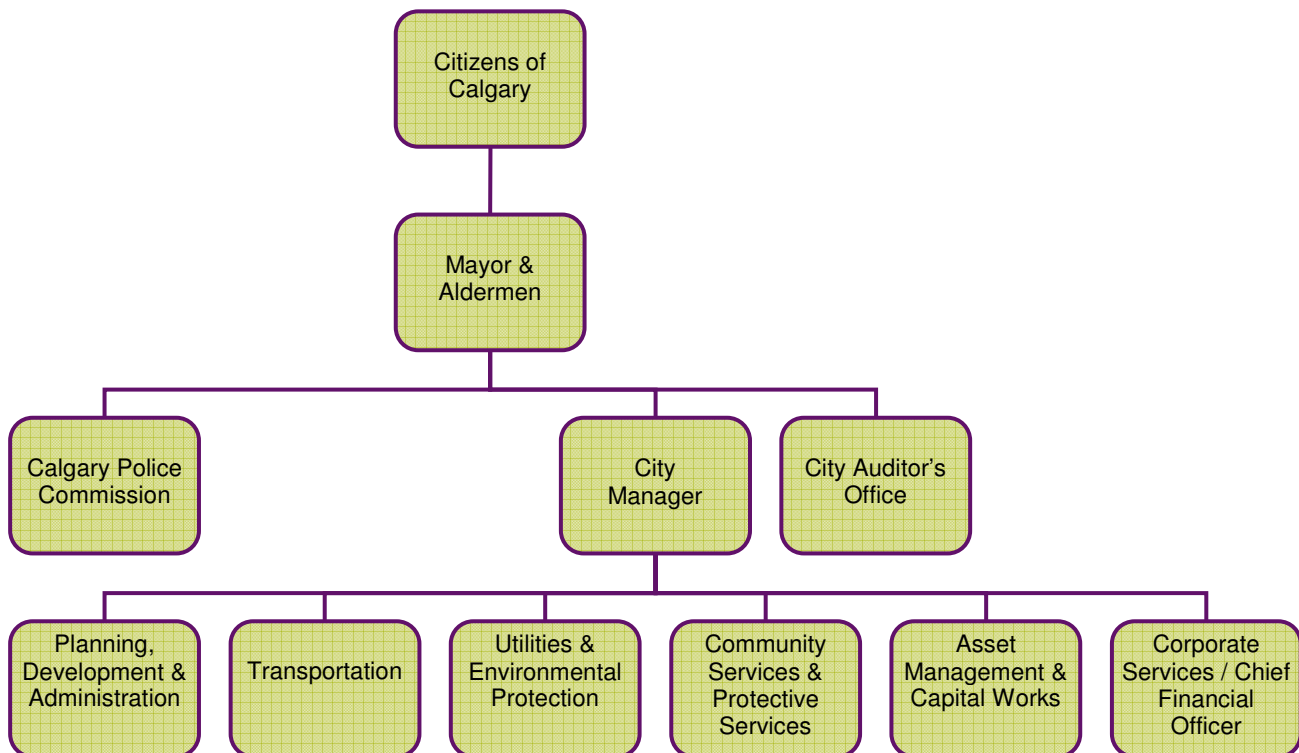
The Calgary City Council is the governing body that represents the citizens of Calgary. The Council has two offices:

- Office of the Mayor
- Office of the Alderman

The Office of the Mayor represents the mayor of Calgary. There is a citywide vote by all eligible voters to choose the mayor of Calgary. The job of the mayor is to do the best thing for the whole city.

The Office of the Alderman has 14 Aldermen who represent the 14 wards (areas) of Calgary. Each alderman represents their own area. The aldermen are elected by the people who live in each ward. Their job is to represent the interests of their respective wards.

In Calgary, citizens vote for members of the Calgary City Council every three years. Other municipalities may have elections every two or every four years.





STEPS FOR VOTING IN A FEDERAL ELECTION

1

YOU NEED A VOTER INFORMATION CARD

If your information is in the National Register of Electors, you will receive a **voter information card**. This tells you that your name is on the voters list and when and where to vote.

2

YOU DID NOT GET A VOTER INFORMATION CARD

If you do not get a **voter information card** in the mail, call your local elections office to get on the voters list. To get this number, you can phone Elections Canada in Ottawa at **1-800 463-6868** or go to their website: **www.elections.ca**

3

ADVANCE POLL AND SPECIAL BALLOT

If you cannot vote on Election Day, you can vote at the advance polls or by special ballot. Dates and location for advance polls are on your **voter information card**.

4

ON ELECTION DAY

You need to go to your local polling station to vote. The information is written on your **voter information card**. The poll officials at the polling station will confirm you are on the voters list by asking your name and address. You must bring identification with you to prove your identity. Then, you will be given a ballot.

5

MARKING THE BALLOT

You will be asked to go behind a screen to mark your ballot. Mark an **"X"** in the circle next to the name of the candidate of your choice.

6

VOTING IS SECRET

Your vote is a secret. Once you make your choice and mark the ballot, fold it and give it to the poll officials.

7

THE BALLOT BOX

The poll official will tear off the counterfoil and hand you back the ballot for you to put in the ballot box.

8

THE ELECTION RESULTS

When the voting is over, every ballot is counted and the results are made public. You can see the results on television or on the Elections Canada website.



POLITICAL PARTIES

When people in Canada vote at federal or provincial level, they usually vote for a person who belongs to a political party although there are also candidates who run as independents in an election. A political party is a group of people who share the same ideas about what the government should do, how the country should be run and what laws should be made. Each party will have a candidate to lead them. This person is someone the party believes will be a good public figure and a good leader. Some political parties have been around for a long time, but Canadians can create new political parties at any time.

WHAT DO THE PARTIES DO?

Members of political parties hold meetings to share their ideas and opinions. They make plans for what they would do if their candidates were elected to government.

Members of political parties also help to:

- Choose the party leader
- Choose the party's candidates, and
- Campaign for party candidates in elections

Each party has a leader. The leader of the party with the largest number of elected members then becomes either the leader of Canada or of the province where the election was held.

In Canada, there are political parties at the federal and provincial levels. Each party has their own platform and they promote these policies to the public to get people to join their party or vote for them in an election.

WHAT IS CAMPAIGNING?

During an election, parties will campaign for your vote. This means that the candidate may come to your house to talk to you, appear on television, radio and the internet, hold meetings in community centres and put up signs and posters. This is how candidates explain their ideas and beliefs to the public. This is how you learn about what a party stands for. You can also read about all the parties that run for election on the internet.

THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

A political spectrum arranges political parties on a horizontal line from left to right. We use it to describe the range of political ideas of different parties, and put parties into groups. In Canada you can place the main political parties on this spectrum, going from left to centre to right. Generally, the ideas to the left are considered socialist, the ideas in the centre are considered liberal and the ideas to the right are considered conservative.



PROVINCIAL POLITICAL PARTIES

Several political parties exist within each province. In Alberta, there are currently 8 parties registered with Elections Alberta. You can learn about each of the provincial political parties or independent candidates by going to Elections Alberta website (www.elections.ab.ca) to get their contact details.





HAVING A PUBLIC VOICE

Voicing your opinion is a way for you to communicate with people in power or decision-making positions. It is a way to express your views or concerns to local, provincial or federal governments, any organization or business, and schools. Many governments, businesses and organizations have information on the internet that asks for your opinion about their programs or services. There are lots of ways to share your views, opinions or concerns.

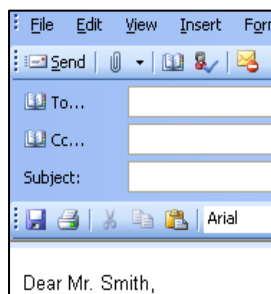
WRITE



PHONE



EMAIL



DEMONSTRATE



- Write a letter to a newspaper, magazine, or television station
- Write an email to a business, organization, newspaper or magazine
- Complete an online form or survey
- Make an appointment to meet someone in person to discuss your concerns
- Call in to a radio show and talk about your views or concerns
- Go to a local community or town hall meeting to talk about your concerns
- Sign a petition
- Demonstrate in a protest

Voicing your opinion can be an exciting and scary decision, especially if you have little experience expressing your views. Think about these benefits of speaking out:

- Improve your writing skills
- Increase your confidence and be assertive
- Experience freedom of expression
- Exercise your right to speak out

MAKE A COMPLAINT OR STATE A CONCERN

One way to become involved in your community is to write to a business, organization or government official about an issue that you would like to see changed, make a complaint, or ask to have a problem fixed. You can have concerns or want to complain about many things. You might complain about a bad or faulty product. You might complain about poor customer service. You might also be concerned about activities or issues in your neighbourhood like poor road conditions, pot-holes, flooding, road construction, or speeding cars in your neighbourhood.



WRITE A LETTER OF COMPLAINT OR CONCERN

If you want to write a letter to express your concern or complain about a problem, it is important to focus on facts, keep to the point and leave out emotion. Address the letter to a person who has some authority and who will understand your situation.

1. Write down every detail. **Who** was involved? **What** problem is there with the product or service? **Where** and **when** did the problem occur (time and place)? Were there any injuries? **How** much did you pay for the product or service?
2. Think about how your situation can be fixed. Do you want to raise awareness of the concern? Do you want an apology? Do you want a replacement product or your money back?
3. Write a letter clearly and focus on all the facts. Give the person a date for responding before you decide to take more steps to solve your concern or problem. End the letter by thanking the person for their time and attention.
4. Before you send your letter or email, wait 24 hours. This gives you time to make sure you have all the information, proof read your letter, or decide if you still want to send it.
5. If you decide to send your letter or email, make a copy for yourself and then send it.
6. If you do not get a response to your first letter, send a second letter or email and tell the person that you already sent a letter before. If the problem is not fixed, then write a letter to a higher person in the business or government department.

Your Name
Your Address

Today's date

Their Name **Business/Government Department**
Their Address

Dear **[Sir/Madam]**,

On **date of problem**, I **purchased** or **experienced** a **problem** or **concern** that involved your **business** or **government department**.

Give details about **problem**, **location**, and **people** involved.

Say exactly what you want from the **business** or **government department** including how you want your problem fixed.

Thank you for your time and attention. You can write to me at the address above or contact me at my home telephone number at **403-XXX-XXXX**.

Yours truly,
[Signature] [First and Last Name]

Say who you are writing to

Say why you are writing and explain the problem in detail

Tell them what you want them to do

Sign your name



WRITE TO A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

If you write to a person who works in government, you could talk about a law that you would like to see changed, taxes, immigration, health care, or something else. Make sure you write your letter to a person in the level of government responsible for the issue. Remember these points:

- 1 → Find out who represents your concerns in the correct level of government
- 2 → Clearly say what the issue is
- 3 → Clearly say how and why you would like to see the law changed for this issue
- 4 → Ask for a reply
- 5 → Keep your letter short
- 6 → Be polite

WRITE A LETTER OF OPINION TO A NEWSPAPER

People may write a letter to a newspaper for many reasons. You can write a letter either to comment on a recent news story that was in the paper, talk about an issue you think is important, or respond to another person's opinion. If your letter is accepted by the editor, it will be printed in the newspaper. Follow these steps to ensure your letter will be read and understood:

1. **Follow the instructions.** Most newspapers and magazines provide guidelines for writing a letter to the editor. Check the first few pages of your newspaper for guidelines and follow them carefully.
2. **Include your name, address, email address and phone number at the top of your letter.** Editors need this information because they will need to prove your identity. If you do not want your name published, you can write this in your letter.
3. **Clearly state why you are writing.** If you are responding to an article or letter, name the article you are responding to in the first sentence of your letter.
4. **Keep it short and focused.** Write your letter in clear language. You will probably need to write several drafts of your letter to make your message simple and clear.
5. **Limit your letter to two or three paragraphs.** Use this format:
 - (1) In your first paragraph, introduce your problem and sum up your objection
 - (2) In the second paragraph, include a few sentences to support your view
 - (3) End with a great summary
6. **Proof read your letter.** Editors will ignore letters that have bad grammar and are poorly written.
7. **Mail your letter or submit your letter by email if the publication allows it.** This allows the editor to copy and paste your letter into the newspaper.



SPEAK ABOUT A COMPLAINT OR CONCERN

If you have concerns that someone is breaking a local law (by-law) within the city, you can make a complaint to your city. For example, in the City of Calgary, you can phone 311 to express your concerns. Most Canadian cities have a system like this to take complaints. You would also phone 311 to request services like: graffiti removal, road and sidewalk maintenance, or streetlight repair. Remember the following points when contacting 311:

- You must give your name, address, phone number, and the address of the property you want to complain about.
- No anonymous complaints are accepted so you must identify yourself. The information is confidential.
- You must describe your complaint briefly and concisely so that staff can respond.
- A copy of your complaint is given to a person (officer) who visits the home or business you have complained about.
- The officer will discuss the complaint with the owner to try and solve the problem. The officer may give a written notice to the owner to resolve the problem by a certain day.
- If the officer returns and finds the owner has not made changes, people may be sent to do the work required to solve the problem such as cut tree branches.

LEAD YOUR COMMUNITY INTO ACTION

GO TO A PUBLIC FORUM ABOUT CONCERNS IN YOUR TOWN, CITY OR PROVINCE

A public forum is a meeting held to express your views, such as a town hall meeting. It is a chance for you to share what you are thinking about a particular issue and be a part of the decision making process. Public meetings can happen at all levels of community or government. They can be held on many different topics, including: the opening of a new school, violence in the community, the construction of new roads or buildings, and new bylaws or regulations. Learn what to expect at a community meeting by using the plan below before you attend.

1. Ask people about their experiences of community meetings or meetings with officials.
2. Think about the meeting you would like to attend:
 - What kind of meeting is it?
 - Who is organizing the meeting and what do you think will happen?
 - Is the meeting about one issue or several?
 - How will people participate?
 - What are the goals of the meeting - to discuss ideas or make a group decision?
 - How do you feel about going to the meeting?
 - What would make you feel more comfortable about being there or participating?



CREATE CHANGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

As you become a part of your community, you might see the need for some changes. For example, your local park might need cleaning up or you might want to arrange a petition to ask that more schools be built in your neighbourhood. If you want to create changes like these in your community, use these steps and action plan to work with a group to solve your problem.

STEP 1 → Clearly state what you want to do.

- What do you already know about the issue?
- What do you think about the issue?
- How does this issue affect you?
- Why is this important?
- What interests you about the issue?
- Who is affected by the issue and why?
- What different opinions exist?

STEP 2 → Figure out the tasks that need to be done, by what time, who will do them, and how they will do them. Check off completed tasks. Use the sample chart to set up your plan.

Action Plan: what we want to accomplish

Job or Task	By when?	Who will do it?	How?	✓
1.				
2.				
3.				

STEP 3 → Decide how you will do it. What kind of help do you need?

- What types of resources do you need to carry out the project? (printing, people, or internet)

STEP 4 → Check off when the task has been done.

STEP 5 → Review the plan to see if it still makes sense.

- What conclusions can you make?
- What evidence supports your conclusions?

STEP 6 → What solutions will solve your problem?

STEP 7 → How will you share the information you learn with others in your community?

- Poster, pamphlet, newsletter, website, workshop, public awareness campaign or festival



REFERENCES

- Cameron, J. & Derwing, T. *Being Canadian: Language for Citizenship*. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice Hall Regents Canada, 1996.
- Calgary Board of Education. "Information for Volunteers in the Calgary Board of Education." <http://www.cbe.ab.ca/Parents/pdfs/Volunteer%20Information%20Booklet.pdf> (accessed August 3, 2009).
- Calgary Board of Education. "School Council Chair Roles and Responsibilities." <http://www.cbe.ab.ca/parents/School Council/sccroleresponsibility.asp> (accessed on August 5, 2009).
- Elections Alberta. "Registered Political Parties and Parties Eligible for Registration." <http://www.electionsalberta.ab.ca/Public%20Website/603.htm> (accessed September 21, 2009).
- Elections Canada. "Registered Political Parties and Parties Eligible for Registration." <http://www.elections.ca/content.asp?section=pol&document=index&dir=par&lang=e&textonly=false> (accessed July 28, 2009).
- Fleming, G. "How to Write a Letter to the Editor." <http://homeworktips.about.com/od/politicalscience/ht/lettertoeditor.htm> (accessed July 29, 2009).
- Government of Canada. *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. www.canadianheritage.gc.ca (accessed on September 21, 2009).
- John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights. "Youth Guide to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms." <http://whatsthe411.ca/Content/File/Projects/Teachers%20Kits/Guide%20to%20Canadian%20Charter%20of%20Rights%20and%20Freedoms.pdf> (accessed July 21, 2009).
- Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada. *A Look at Canada*. Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006.
- Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. "The Citizen's Guide to the Alberta Legislature." 6th ed. <http://www.assembly.ab.ca/pub/gdbook/CitizensGuide.pdf> (accessed August 12, 2009).
- City of Calgary. "The City of Calgary Municipal Handbook City Organizational Chart." http://www.calgary.ca/docgallery/bu/mhbook/municipal_handbook.pdf (accessed August 13, 2009).