

Election 2017: Your Guide

Posted: March 17, 2017 - 9:00am by Employee News

On May 9, British Columbia will hold its 41st provincial general election. For BC Public Service employees, this is a time of increased diligence and sensitivity in terms of our day-to-day work, whether it's how we manage records, run hiring competitions, enter into contracts and much more.

Speech from the Throne

- Read by the Lieutenant Governor, the Speech from the Throne introduces a new session of parliament.
- The speech typically takes place in February, one week prior to Budget Day. In 2017, the Speech from the Throne was on February 14.
- The speech offers a broad overview of the government's agenda for this session of the Legislative Assembly.

Budget Day

- Budget Day is legislated to occur on the third Tuesday in February each year. In 2017, this took place on February 21.
- The Minister of Finance presents the budget, outlining the financial plan for the province over the next three years.
- Estimates are also presented at the same time, but are debated over a longer period.

Pre-Writ Period

- This is the period leading up to the issuing of the writs, or election day 0, on April 11.
- This is a time of increased diligence, when action is taken to ensure routine government operations will be able to continue during the Interregnum Period.
- Major items that could arise after the issuing of the writs are anticipated and brought forward for consideration by Cabinet before the Writ Period begins.

Government Communications Blackout (Updated March 23)

- As of March 31, government **advertising** will be limited to public health and safety, statutory items, and responses to the public.
- As of April 11, **all communications activities** will be limited to public health and safety, statutory items, and responses to the public. This includes social media, websites, public engagement, publications and informational materials.
- The blackout continues throughout the Interregnum Period until the post-election transition period is complete.

Writs are Issued (Day 0)

- A writ is a formal order calling for an election to be held in an electoral district. The writs are issued on day 0 of the 51-day election period.
- There are multiple writs, since a writ has to be issued for each electoral district in the province. In 2017, this means 87 writs will be issued and, subsequently, returned.
- The issuing of the writs signifies the dissolution of the Legislative Assembly. Cabinet members cease to be MLAs, but do not cease to be ministers since the executive branch must continue to function even during an election period.

Campaign Period

- The Campaign Period begins with the issuing of the writs on April 11.
- The Campaign Period runs until the close of voting on General Voting Day (May 9).
- Certain rules apply for candidates during the Campaign Period, concerning advertising, expenditure, and how and where campaign activities can be held.

Election Period

- The Election Period begins with the issuing of the writs on day 0 (April 11).
- The Election Period is typically 51 days long, running until the return of the writs on day 50 (May 31).

Interregnum Period

- The Interregnum Period is the “gap between governments” – the period from when the Legislative Assembly is dissolved until the incoming government is established.
- It typically runs from the day the writs are issued until the day the writs are returned. In 2017, this will mean the Interregnum Period runs from April 11 to May 31.
- It cannot be assumed that the same government will still be in office following the election, so during the Interregnum Period, the outgoing government acts in “caretaker mode,” avoiding any major decisions or changes that would bind the next government.
- There are a number of issues to be aware of in terms of what government can and can’t do during this time. As a public service employee, you must ensure you maintain the Standards of Conduct and fulfil your responsibilities in a non-partisan manner. More information about your specific responsibilities can be found in this infographic.
- These responsibilities do not disappear as soon as the new government is announced. Public service employees must continue to exercise extra diligence and caution during the period of transition to the incoming government.

Advance Voting

- Advance voting at physical advance voting locations is available for anyone wishing to cast their vote ahead of General Voting Day (May 9).
- Advance voting takes place on the Saturday and Sunday two weeks before General Voting Day, and also on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the week

before General Voting Day. In 2017, these dates are April 29 and 30, and May 3, 4, 5 and 6.

- There are also options available for absentee voting and special voting. See the [Elections BC](#) site for more information.

General Voting Day (Day 28)

- General Voting Day takes place on day 28. In 2017, this is Tuesday, May 9.
- This is the day on which most people will vote for the MLA in their electoral district.
- Once the polling stations close at 8 p.m., the ballots are counted to determine preliminary results.

Preliminary Results Announced

- General voting is closed at 8 p.m. on General Voting Day. Once voting is closed, an initial count of the ballots in each electoral district is completed.
- Preliminary results for each electoral district are released later the same evening.
- These preliminary results include ballots cast from within the electoral district in question, for both advance and general voting.

Final Count

- The final count takes place over three days, beginning 13 days after General Voting Day. In 2017, this will be May 22-24.
- The final count includes all of the ballots not considered as part of the initial count, including those that were cast by voters who voted outside of their electoral district, or by mail.

Judicial Recounts

- After the results from the final count for each district are announced, there are six days in which an application can be made for a judicial recount.
- If there are no judicial recounts, the writs of election are returned on day 50 (May 31).

Return of the Writs (Day 50)

- Following the count of all votes, including any judicial recounts, the writ of election for each district is returned to the Chief Electoral Officer.
- There is one writ for each electoral district – in 2017, there will be 87 writs returned.
- The date set for the return of the writs is day 50 (May 31).

MLAs Confirmed

- Following the final count and any judicial recounts, the writs are returned to the Chief Electoral Officer.

- As soon as possible after the writs have been returned, the Chief Electoral Officer prepares a report that outlines the individuals elected to serve as MLAs and delivers this to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.
- This process effectively confirms which MLAs have been elected.

Post-Election Transition Period

- Following the confirmation of the election results, it is time to transition the incoming government into office.
- The Lieutenant Governor asks the leader of the political party that holds the majority to form a government and take on the role of Premier.
- The Premier then recommends the make-up of the Cabinet, which is established via Order in Council.
- There is no time limit for forming the new Executive Council, but the expectation is that it will be formed without “unnecessary delay” – it happens pretty quickly following the election.

Your Responsibilities

During the election period, government should not conduct any activities that are controversial, non-routine, and that could not be reversed by a new government without undue cost or disruption.

Records Management

- Deputy Ministers have custody of all the records in the ministry, including those from the Minister’s office.
- No BC Public Service employee other than Deputies, Associate Deputies and Cabinet Operations should be in possession of Cabinet documents at the point the writs are issued.
- Non-Cabinet records must be diligently managed, and government must still respond to Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) requests.

Contracts

- No major new contracts are to be signed during the election period.
- Routine contracts and rollovers can still be entered into, and routine decisions made.
- Ministries may put extra checks or approvals in place to manage contracts during this period of increased scrutiny.

Appointments and Hiring

- No appointments are made to agencies, boards or commissions during the election period. Forward planning should take place to renew appointments before the writs are issued

- Routine hiring can still continue, whether you are mid-competition at the point the writs are issued or needing to fill a new/vacant position.

Correspondence and FOIPPA

- Normal correspondence continues, although the Minister won't be signing anything.
- This is a time of heightened sensitivity, so you should notify your supervisor if you are contacted by an MLA's office, a ministerial assistant, or receive any other contact that is out of the ordinary.
- During this period, you must continue to respond to FOI requests as you normally would.

Advertising, Internet and Social Media

- All of these activities should "go silent" insofar as possible during an election period.
- Statutory advertising, and internet and social media activity relating to public health and safety, are the exception and may continue.
- Social media feeds must be approached with extreme caution. Nothing that could be perceived as partisan can be posted – this includes posting information about a government program.
- No new websites or web pages should go live during the election period. Updating web content is restricted to fixing spelling errors or correcting information already posted.

Policy Decisions

- No new policy decisions are to be announced during the election period.
- Policy decisions can be made until the point that the writs are issued, but even during the pre-writ period leading up to this, extra caution must be exercised.
- Forward planning should take place to ensure major policy changes or decisions are handled well before the election, or deferred until the incoming government has transitioned in.

The Voice of the Public Servant

The election period is also a time of increased awareness in terms of how we communicate, both in person and online. Look out for our next Election 2017 article concerning impartiality, social media, and how these relate to the Standards of Conduct .