



How does someone become a Member of the Legislative Assembly in the first place?

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Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

How Members are Elected

Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)

Manitoba's Legislative Assembly is made up of 57 persons known as Members or MLAs. Each Member represents a certain area of the province known either as an electoral division, constituency or riding.

How does someone become a Member of the Legislative Assembly in the first place? Is a candidate chosen by the Premier? or by a political party (for example, the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party, or the Progressive Conservative Party)? To answer these questions, let's follow the process of becoming a candidate and getting elected as an MLA.

Candidates

Qualifications

According to The Elections Act, any person can become a candidate who is

- 18 years of age or older on election day
- has been living in Manitoba for at least six months before election day
- is a Canadian citizen but not an election officer and
- has never been found guilty of committing an election offense anywhere in Canada

A person who wants to be a candidate but has a job can write his or her employer to request time off. According to the act, the employer must grant a leave of absence without pay to such an employee, unless the employer can prove that the leave would seriously harm the employer's operations.

Representing a political party

Let's assume that our candidate-to-be has met all the requirements listed above. He or she may want to run for a particular party and may go after a nomination within it. The party holds an election of its own to determine who will be its official representative. If our candidate is successful, then he or she has the party's backing and assistance in the form of volunteer campaign workers and fundraisers. The nomination process is also likely to earn our candidate media coverage, which will help his or her campaign.

Running as an independent

Our candidate may not want to represent a particular party but may choose to run as an independent. Independent candidates often campaign on a single issue of importance to them (such as the environment) rather than on a wide range of issues. These candidates may have the backing of an individual or group of people who help run the campaign. Frequently, though, independent candidates pay their own election expenses, such as the cost of printing, advertising and lawn-signs.

Filing nomination papers

Our candidate's next step is to file nomination papers with the Returning Officer before 1 p.m. on nomination day. A Returning Officer is appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer and is officially responsible for conducting the election in one riding.

The Election

Calling a General Election

According to the Constitution of Canada and The Legislative Assembly Act, a general election must be held at least every five years from the date of the last election. It is the Premier who calls the election and names a specific election day. When that happens, the Chief Electoral Officer issues a Writ of Election to each Returning Officer. This process is sometimes known as "dropping the Writ." It formally starts the election period, which lasts a minimum of 33 days. The Writ dissolves the Assembly, so there are no Members of the Assembly during this period. The executive government-the Premier and Cabinet Ministers-remains in place throughout the election. Thus, we have continuous government even though there is no elected Assembly.

Preparing for the Election

The Chief Electoral Officer and his or her staff are non-partisan. Their office is independent and accountable to the entire Legislative Assembly, not to government. The Chief Electoral Officer is responsible for co-ordinating the election across the province and publishing election notices.

The Returning Officer for each electoral division makes the detailed arrangements for holding the election in that electoral division. He or she is responsible for hiring and training persons to act as enumerators who call door-to-door to make lists of eligible voters. Other duties include setting up voting places, hiring and training poll officials, printing ballots and ensuring that ballots and ballot boxes go to poll officials at the right time.

Election Day

On election day, voters go to the voting place and give their names to an official who checks their names off the voters list*. Each voter receives a paper ballot and then goes behind the voting screen to vote for the candidate of their choice. The ballot is then placed in the ballot box under the watchful eye of scrutineers representing each candidate. Scrutineers do not see how any individual has voted. Their job is to ensure that the ballot box was empty before the voting started, that no one votes more than once, and that the counting of votes is done fairly.

*If an eligible voter is not on the voters list he or she can produce two pieces of identification to be added onto the voters list on election day.

When the count is completed, the results are reported to the Returning Officer. He or she confirms the calculations, officially announces the total results in that electoral division and names the candidate receiving the most votes as the Member for that electoral division. This process is known as the "return of the Writ." It completes the election of a candidate as a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Taking a Seat in the Assembly

An elected candidate may now be considered a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. Yet, there is one more vital step before he or she can take a seat in the Legislature. That step is the "swearing-in" ceremony. Members take an oath or affirmation of allegiance before the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. Only then may the Member take his or her place in the Assembly chamber to participate in its day-to-day proceedings.