

Election 2006



Literacy Action Kit

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Introduction

Election 2006: Literacy Action Kit

What is this Kit?

MCL's **Election 2006 Literacy Action Kit** provides the information you need to make an informed vote, as well as tools you can use to make literacy an election issue in your riding.

Why get involved at Election time?

An election offers a great opportunity to find out where politicians stand on issues and to get commitments from candidates who want your vote. Locally, your work during and after the campaign could result in strong connections to your future Member of Parliament. Nationally, our combined voices can demonstrate a powerful and united force for meaningful policy and resource commitments for literacy.

How to use this kit

Please use, adapt, or share these resources as you see fit. If we all take a stand, we can pave the way for renewed commitments, action, and resources for literacy in Canada.



If you can only do three things ...

Pressed for time? Short on resources?

Please consider doing these three things to raise the profile of literacy at election time:

1. Use the tools in this kit to **make contact once with each candidate** in your riding (by letter, by phone, or in person).
2. **Raise literacy at one public forum** (e.g., radio phone-in show, all candidate's debate, letter to the editor, etc).
3. **Tell us what you did.** Knowing how the candidates responded to your efforts will inform MCL's work in Ottawa over the long term.



How to identify the candidates

As soon as information is available, Elections Canada will list the names of candidates, their political affiliation, and contact information on the Elections Canada website.

The Elections Canada website is: www.elections.ca
Click on “voter information services”
Or, call Elections Canada toll-free: 1-800-463-6868

You can also identify local candidates and obtain contact information for the candidates you choose to contact through each of the political parties’ websites. There are nine political parties officially registered with Elections Canada:

Liberal Party of Canada: www.liberal.ca
Conservative Party of Canada: www.conservative.ca
New Democratic Party of Canada: www.ndp.ca
Bloc Quebecois: www.blocquebecois.org
Green Party: www.greenparty.ca
Canadian Action Party: www.canadianactionparty.ca
Communist Party of Canada: www.comunist-party.ca
Marxist Leninist Party of Canada: www.cpcml.ca
Marijuana Party: www.marijuanaparty.com



Lobbying a candidate by phone

Sometimes it's hard to know what to say to a candidate once you've got them on the phone. Here's a guide that might help:

1. Hello, I am a resident of *(name the riding or community)* who will be voting in the upcoming election. May I talk with *(name of candidate)*?

(Don't settle for an assistant – ask for the candidate to return your call!)

2. My name is _____, and I care about literacy because I am a *(literacy practitioner, worker, teacher, learner, business owner, etc)*, as well as a member of this community.

3. Your support for Literacy is important because *(give some reasons why literacy support is crucial in your area – i.e. provide statistics, key to economic development, community development, despite need programs are struggling – whatever you see as important!)*.

4. I would like to know where you stand on literacy, and if I can count on you to be a literacy advocate after the election - here at home and in Ottawa? *(Fill in their response here so you can inform MCL!)*

5. Thank you for talking with me – I'll consider your comments when I cast my ballot.



Writing to a candidate

You may want to write to the candidate and deliver your messages by mail or by fax. Feel free to copy this template onto your letterhead. Be sure to add your own personal voice – your experience is key to influencing change and to securing meaningful long-term relationships!

Your address
Today's date

Candidate's Name
Campaign Address

Dear *(name of candidate)*:

Did you know that 2 out of 5 adults in Canada have major difficulty with reading or writing? In our community, too many adults don't have the literacy skills they need to succeed in today's society.

As a *(member of the literacy community, practitioner, community worker, administrator)*, I know the effect that literacy problems can have on learners and their families, and on the social and economic vitality of our community. I also know that right now people in our community with low literacy skills are not getting the support they need to improve their skills. *(If you have local examples of the gap and the impact of inaction, add them here.)*

In an increasingly complex world, where information drives our society and our economy, we cannot afford to leave millions of Canadians with low literacy behind. This is becoming increasingly clear to many in the business, labour, community, and government sectors, who have expressed their support by identifying literacy action as a priority. As a candidate for federal office, it's important that we know where you stand too.

I want to know what you will do, both at home and in Ottawa, to support literacy and to support improved opportunities for less literate Canadians. Will you work with local literacy groups to advance literacy in our community? Will you support a promised comprehensive pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy? Your response to these questions will help me decide how to vote in this election.

I hope to hear from you soon. *(I have enclosed a questionnaire, which I hope you will respond to and return to me. OR... Please call me so we can discuss this issue further.)*

Yours truly,



(Provide address and phone number as contact information)

Meet with the candidates

Face-to-face meetings are the most effective way to influence change. Here are some suggestions on how to set up meetings with candidates in your riding.

1. Make contact	<p>Phone the candidate's campaign office and ask to speak with the campaign manager.</p> <p>Identify yourself and ask for a meeting.</p> <p>Arrange to go to the campaign headquarters on your own or with a few colleagues, or invite the candidate to your offices or classroom to meet with a larger group.</p>
2. Do your homework	<p>Once the meeting is set, spend some time preparing.</p> <p>There is a difference between meeting with an MP who is running for re-election and a candidate for that MP's job!</p> <p>Consider who the candidate is and what they stand for when developing your meeting strategy. Are they running for re-election? Are they a new candidate? Are they from the governing party, or from the opposition?</p> <p>Before you meet with a sitting MP, try to have a broad idea of what they've done in the past to support literacy – if you can't think of anything, then maybe they haven't done enough!</p>



<p>3. Set an agenda</p>	<p>You don't need something on paper, but you should have a general idea about messages you want to deliver. Here are some suggestions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Give a reason for the meeting (i.e., literacy is important to the community). (2) Talk about local literacy challenges and opportunities. (3) Ask the candidate where they stand on literacy. (4) Secure their commitment to advance literacy at home and in Ottawa. (5) Refer them to MCL's Parliamentarian's Tool Kit (www.literacy.ca), which provides suggestions on how they can make a difference. (6) Thank them for the meeting.
<p>4. Send a thank you note</p>	<p>Even losing candidates may emerge as influential community leaders in the future.</p>
<p>5. Keep track of where the candidates stand and vote!</p>	<p>Share the information you've gathered with your community (and with MCL!).</p>



How to use the Candidate Questionnaire

This suggested questionnaire will help you to deliver some important messages about literacy and also to get the answers you need to make an informed decision. Also, the responses you receive will provide a permanent record that you can use, and MCL can use, to hold politicians to their word.

Here are some ways you can use the questionnaire:

- **No time for a letter?** Just print the backgrounder and questionnaire off and fax them to the candidate's campaign office. Make sure to provide your contact information in the spaces provided.
- Attach the complete questionnaire, or part of it, to your letter to the candidate.
- When you meet with a candidate, privately or at a public forum, give them a copy of the questionnaire along with your contact information.
- Choose one or two questions and raise them at a candidate's forum, ie: all-candidates meeting, open radio call-in show, or at a face to face meeting that you have set up.
- After the election, send a copy of any responses you may have received from the newly elected MP to MCL.



Candidates: where do you stand on Literacy?

Advancing Literacy in Canada: An urgent call to action

Background

In today's rapidly changing world, a solid literacy foundation – both for individuals and for our society – is more important than ever before. Yet according to a study recently released by Statistics Canada, 2 out of 5 Canadians do not have the literacy skills necessary to meet the demands of today's information-based society. This is a national issue and demands national attention.

The economic and social benefits to be gained from improving literacy are huge. A recent report from the CD Howe Institute shows that a 1% rise in literacy would raise Canada's productivity and increase our GDP by as much as \$18 billion a year! Also, addressing literacy is key to addressing many of our most pressing social issues – contributing to better outcomes for children; greater equity for Aboriginal peoples; smoother integration of newcomers; lower healthcare costs; less poverty; safer communities; greater civic participation; and more.

Despite the potential benefits, only a small percentage of Canadians who need help are getting the supports and training they need. Across the country, literacy organizations have been trying to address our literacy challenges with too few resources, and without the benefit of a coordinated national vision and strategy.

The time is right for federal leadership.

Literacy is too important to our nation not to have national leadership, vision and a comprehensive pan-Canadian strategy. The literacy community is not alone in calling for action on literacy. The call has been echoed by a wide range of stakeholders. An all party Parliamentary Standing Committee, a multi-sectoral Minister's Advisory Committee, provincial and territorial government leaders, and leaders from business, labour, and the Aboriginal community have all identified literacy as a priority.

Your responses to the following questions will give us an idea of where you stand on literacy. Thank you for taking the time to respond.



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Questions for Candidates

Your responses to the following questions will be shared with members of the literacy community and others. We look forward to your responses.



1. Two out of five Canadians face serious literacy challenges: they don't have the skills they need to deal with the demands of today's constantly changing information-based economy and society. These literacy challenges have a cost – for families, communities and our country. Yet, Canada remains one of the few industrialized countries without a national strategy for adult literacy.

Will you join leaders from the community sector, business, labour, and across government jurisdictions in supporting the call for a comprehensive, pan-Canadian action on literacy?

2. A blueprint for action on literacy is ready. At the request of the federal government, the literacy community worked with partners from a wide variety of sectors to develop a comprehensive pan-Canadian literacy strategy. This action plan was delivered to the government in the fall of 2005. We hope that after the election, all parties will push for concrete action on this agenda.

- a. Will you be a literacy champion – committed to raising literacy as a priority within your caucus and within parliament?
- b. Will you support concrete federal action to implement a comprehensive pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy?
- c. Will you work to ensure that this plan has the resources necessary to make a difference?

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3. Literacy is an issue in our community. If elected, you need to be aware that many of your constituents face literacy challenges. You also need to be aware that literacy has an impact on the social and economic health of our community.

If you are elected, will you agree to meet with members of the local literacy community to discuss literacy and its impact on your constituents and on our community?

Please forward your responses to:



Step-by-step election strategy

Where are the opportunities to promote literacy during a campaign? Here is an outline of how campaigns are organized, and a checklist of steps you can take along the way to promote literacy.

Election Opportunity	Your Step-by-Step Strategy
<p>Connect with the candidates' Campaign Headquarters</p>	<p>Contact Elections Canada or the Parties' websites to get contact information for candidates in your riding.</p> <p>Call each candidate's campaign office for the date, location and time of scheduled public functions at which the candidate will appear.</p> <p>Create a calendar showing all such events. Share the calendar with others who support your views on literacy.</p> <p>Try to get at least one person who will speak up for literacy to attend each event.</p>
<p>Reach out to the candidates in writing, in person, or by phone.</p>	<p>Send a letter or questionnaire (based on the templates in this toolkit).</p> <p>Phone the candidate (use the "script" in this tool kit).</p> <p>Set up a meeting with the candidates (use the step-by-step meetings guide in this tool kit).</p>



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<p>Get the candidate on the record and share this information with the community.</p>	<p>The candidate's a questionnaire will help you to deliver some important messages about literacy and get the answers you need to make an informed decision. Also, the responses you receive will provide a permanent record that you can use, and MCL can use, to hold politicians to their word.</p> <p>Use the Candidate's Questionnaire template in this tool kit.</p> <p>Attach the questionnaire to a letter. Fax the questionnaire on its own. Or, raise some of the questions at an all candidates' debate.</p>
<p>Canvassing</p>	<p>Raise literacy with candidates or their representatives if they knock on your door or phone you during the campaign.</p>
<p>All candidate's meetings</p>	<p>Attend all-candidates meetings and debates. Look for the location of microphones and position yourself nearby so you will be ready to pose a question.</p> <p>Consider distributing easy to read literature about literacy to the audience before hand.</p>



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<p>Television/radio call-in shows</p>	<p>If you hear about a radio or television call-in program, contact the station in advance to ask if they will include the issue of adult literacy on the agenda.</p> <p>Be sure to phone in with literacy-related questions and information.</p>
<p>The volunteer workforce</p>	<p>Volunteer in a campaign. Or, if you want to be strategic, choose the campaign of the obvious front-runner.</p> <p>Be sure to identify yourself as a person who is interested in literacy issues.</p> <p>Your commitment could be as little as a few hours spent stuffing envelopes. The more time you invest, the more credibility you will have, and the stronger tie you will have to a candidate who could be your future MP.</p>
<p>Educate and influence the candidates by offering plain language services</p>	<p>Candidates need to communicate effectively with constituents.</p> <p>Consider meeting with each of the candidates (or at least the front-runner) and offer to review their election communications to ensure it is in clear language.</p> <p>At the same time, you will be educating the candidate about the extent of literacy challenges in the community.</p>



Using the media

Extensive election coverage provides many opportunities to bring literacy into the public spotlight.

1. Opportunity: You've identified key election issues that are always in the headlines

Media Strategy: Get the media's attention by connecting literacy to key election issues. Is healthcare the most important election issue in your region? Consider writing a letter to the local newspaper linking health to literacy, and then connecting the dots to the need for increased literacy resources? From security, to economic development, to crime prevention – many hot-button election issues have links to literacy. (see MCL fact sheets).

2. Opportunity: Use the election itself as a reason to raise the extent of literacy challenges in your community.

Media Strategy: Too many Canadians won't even cast a ballot because their lack of literacy skills pushes them to the margins or makes participation difficult. Write a letter to the editor linking this to the general challenges faced by programs, from the lack of an effective national literacy strategy to a lack of resources.

3. Opportunity: The candidates are appearing on a local radio or cable access show.

Media Strategy: Call up a local radio or cable access television phone-in show and ask the candidate about literacy. If you hear ads for an upcoming show, write or fax the station in advance and ask the show's producer to put literacy on the agenda.



The day after the election

As soon as the votes are counted and a winner is announced, it's time to connect with your new MP or to reconnect with a re-elected MP. Here's a sample letter to assist you.

Date

Address

Dear (name of new or re-elected MP):

Congratulations on your recent *(re)election* as MP of *(name of riding)*. The citizens of our community have provided you with a tremendous opportunity to represent our interests in the House of Commons.

As a literacy *(tutor, administrator, worker, etc)*, representing *(name of program, organization, etc)*, I am writing to offer my support and also to express my hope that you will *(prove to be or continue to be)* a literacy champion both here at home and in Ottawa. As you may know, our community and our nation face serious literacy challenges. One in five adults in Canada have serious difficulty reading or writing. In our community, low literacy bars a large number of your constituents from reaching their full potential. Despite this, literacy resources are stretched to the limit and the lack of progress on a promised federal literacy policy and pan-Canadian literacy strategy is a concern.

Your *(election / re-election)* offers some hope. Throughout your term, I trust we will work together closely to advance literacy in our community and that you will also work with Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL), to secure literacy advances at the national level as well.

Once again, congratulations on the election! I look forward to a congenial and successful collaboration in support of literacy over the coming years.

Yours sincerely,

(your name)

(name of your organization)



Tell us how it went!

Whether you used this kit, or developed your own approach, please take some time to tell us about your election campaign strategy! Knowing how the candidates responded to your efforts will inform MCL's work in Ottawa over the long term.

Return this completed form to MCL by mail, by fax, or by e-mail.

Movement for Canadian Literacy

300-180 Metcalfe Street

Ottawa, Ontario

K2P 1P5

Fax: (613) 563-2504

e-mail: mcl@literacy.ca

1. Did you use any of these election resources? Which ones?

2. If you used the tools, did you find them useful? Why or why not?

3. Did you receive responses from any of the candidates?



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4. **If the winning candidate responded to your inquiries can you please provide the name of this MP, a copy of their responses or their promises concerning literacy, or summarize their comments below:**

Name of MP:

Attachment enclosed:

Summary of the MP's stated position on literacy:



5. **Do you think it's important for MCL to follow up with this MP as a potential literacy champion in Ottawa?**

6. **What, if anything, could MCL do differently next time to assist you in your election advocacy?**

