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"If we are going to prevent the rise of antidemocratic forces, both the government and the philanthropic sector will need to invest in our democracy and provide the critical resources to sustain and build on these local efforts."

- John Beebe, The Toronto Star How to prevent the rise of anti-democratic forces, The Toronto Star

ABOUT THE DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT EXCHANGE

The Democratic Engagement Exchange's mission is to build a vibrant and inclusive democracy where everyone living in Canada can contribute. A vibrant democracy is key to building healthy communities and finding solutions to our most pressing challenges. The Exchange does this through thought leadership, creating community centred solutions, and cross-sectoral engagement. The Exchange advises civil society organizations and government agencies and creates award-winning policies, programs, and resources to build power from the ground-up.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada's 2021 federal election took place under unprecedented circumstances. It was the first modern federal election held during a global pandemic, in the shortest possible length allowed by law:

JUST 36 DAYS

As a result, the Democratic Engagement Exchange had to develop new resources and approaches to training and outreach to meet the needs of community based organizations and local leaders interested in non-partisan voter outreach and engagement. This created both opportunities and challenges. By focusing on digital outreach and engagement efforts, The Exchange was able to engage hundreds of organizations and local leaders across Canada. With limited resources, a short election period, and an ever-evolving landscape, the Exchange served as both a hub and a vital democratic lifeline for organizations already struggling to meet pressing needs related to responding to the pandemic. However, without in-person training and engagement activities it was challenging to reach new and infrequent voters who might not otherwise have participated in the election.

One key outcome of the VOTE 2021 campaign was continued capacity building within the community sector. Trusted community based organizations and local leaders are the frontlines of healthy democracy. However, their voter outreach and engagement efforts are too often ad-hoc and underresourced. The VOTE 2021 campaign continued to build capacity by ensuring that organizations and local leaders had access to free proven resources and training that maximized the impact of their grassroots efforts. Through the Exchange's election readiness training, toolkits, resources and the Canadian VOTE Coalition network, the community sector had access to vital information and tools to lead voter engagement activities in the communities they serve.

On an individual basis the pandemic had two contradictory consequences. For some, it reinforced the sense of social connection and community bonds by demonstrating how we rely on each other for our health and well-being. For others, it deepened social isolation by cutting people off from community and the incidental interactions that remind us daily of our connections to each other. For people already engaged in our democracy, the pandemic served as a powerful reminder of the role that the government plays in ensuring the wellbeing of their community. For people not engaged in our democracy, the pandemic reduced opportunities for connections that are often critical pathways into further engagement. This experience made voter outreach and engagement work both more important and more challenging than ever.

WHAT WE DID

of media hits: 33 (featured on CBC The National, Toronto Star, Globe and Mail)

of Election Readiness Trainings: 10

of Training Attendees: 402

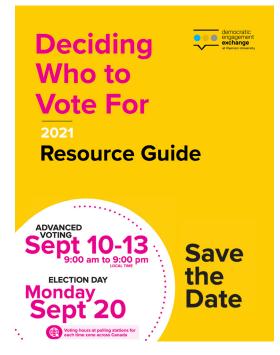
of Canadian VOTE Coalition organizations:

2019 - 740 non-profit organizations and local leaders

2019 - 400+ community sector organizations

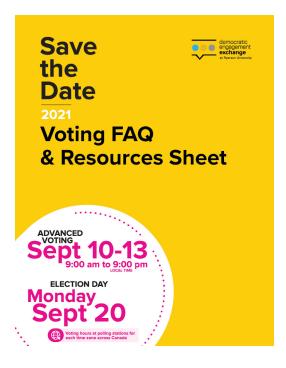
2021 - 94 new organizations











KEY INSIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

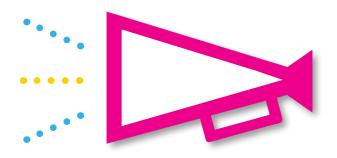
In person face-to-face is still more effective than digital outreach

Organizations found it challenging to effectively engage new and infrequent voters through digital media. This confirms what research suggests: in-person, face-to-face conversation is the most effective way to engage new and infrequent voters. We observed that digital engagement can work for voters who are already active participants in the democratic process, but it is not a powerful way to reach new and infrequent voters¹. Without a large budget for paid digital advertising that would deliver content to a targeted audience, social media algorithms meant that people already politically engaged were most likely to see content designed for new voters. This reaffirms our findings from 2015 and 2019 that in-person programming, such as Vote PopUp, delivered through trusted community partners, is a critical tool to harder to engage reach first time and infrequent voters.

There is a strong desire from the community and social service sector for voter engagement resources and activities

For many community-based organizations, voter engagement is outside the scope of their formal mission and services. Nonetheless, they often have a deep commitment to strengthening the voice of their community. In

addition, these organizations are best placed to lead voter engagement activities as they have trusted ties with new and infrequent voters and are on the frontlines of democracy. Staff from across Canada expressed their reliance on the training, expertise and easy-to-use resources produced by the Exchange in offering their community valuable non-partisan information about democratic engagement during the election.



Campus based voter outreach and engagement needs to be strengthened

Elections Canada was forced to make the difficult decision to suspend its Vote On Campus program because of the pandemic, the snap election and the short writ period. While Elections Canada has committed to reinstating the program in future elections, it is clear that more needs to be done to engage post-secondary students on campus. The student-led XU Votes program at Ryerson University demonstrated what is possible with a coordinated engagement effort. College and university administrators should designate a staff lead to coordinate outreach efforts. Elections Canada Returning Officers should have a mandate to work with school administrators and students to support campus based outreach efforts. And all student unions and associations should work closely with their national offices to develop and lead voter outreach on campuses.

Bridging the funding gap is necessary to build a vibrant and inclusive democracy

For many organizations, voter engagement and outreach is done off the side of their desks and from a deep commitment to creating more inclusive democracy. While the Exchange can support this mission with training and materials, local organizations require funding to strengthen and sustain these efforts if we are going to build a vibrant and healthy democracy where all voices are heard at the ballot box. This requires investment in our democratic infrastructure to strengthen the connective tissue of our democracy through community organizations and local leaders on the ground.



2021 CAMPAIGN TIMELINE

JUNE 24	Elections 101 Training Series Launched
AUGUST 6	Canadian VOTE Coalition relaunched
AUGUST 15	Writ Drop
AUGUST 16	Exchange Election Web Hub Launched
SEPTEMBER 10-13	Advanced Polls
SEPTEMBER 20	Election Day

CANADIAN VOTE COALITION

OVERVIEW

How do we build a vibrant democracy of 35 million Canadians spread across 13 provinces and territories? We work together. For this reason, the Canadian VOTE Coalition has been a central component of our outreach and engagement efforts for the last two federal elections.

One of the most powerful outcomes of the Canadian VOTE Coalition is building capacity across the community sector. Launched by the Exchange and Apathy is Boring in 2019 and reignited for the 2021 federal election, it is Canada's only non-partisan voter outreach and engagement movement. The Canadian VOTE Coalition serves as a hub where community organizations and local leaders across Canada gain access to training, resources, and convenings produced by the Exchange and are able to share best practices. As a result, many organizations across Canada in the community sector have the knowledge, skillset and capacity to lead effective voter engagement activities that support a healthy and vibrant democracy.

Local community-based organizations like public libraries, community food centres, and settlement agencies have trusted relationships with their community and have a critical role to play in promoting participation in elections. They are at the frontlines of democracy, however, often do not have the resources or mandate to do voter outreach and engagement. By organizing the coalition, we were able to share best practices, provide authoritative and trusted information about ways, where and when to vote and inspire participation from groups that have never promoted voting before.

OUTREACH STRATEGY

The Exchange's outreach strategy leveraged strategic partnerships with national and provincial membership-based organizations whose networks include subsidiary organizations for the largest reach. For example, United Way Canada and YWCA Canada both communicate regularly with local United Ways and YWCAs across the country. These organizations are best positioned for the largest reach to social service staff across the country.

Organizations that featured the Canadian VOTE Coalition and distributed materials amongst its staff and community members included:

- YMCA CANADA
- UNITED WAY CANADA / CENTRAIDE
- UNITED WAY GREATER TORONTO
- SAMARA CENTRE FOR DEMOCRACY

- SOCIAL PLANNING TORONTO
- CANADIAN ALLIANCE STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS
- COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRES OF CANADA
- TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY

UNITED WAY CANADA / CENTRAIDE

Recipients include all staff from 71 United Ways and Centraides across Canada and its network of 3000 community agencies.

YMCA CANADA

Collectively, these 39 YMCAs support over 2.25 million people achieving better health at over 1.700 locations across Canada.

CANADIAN ALLIANCE STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS (CASA)

CASA currently has 24 members from postsecondary institutions across Canada, who represent 275,000 students.

SOCIAL PLANNING TORONTO

Social Planning Toronto includes 78 social service agencies and community centres within its membership serving hundreds of thousands of people across the Greater Toronto Area.

The Canadian Vote Coalition campaign involved regular newsletters, social media promotion and cross promoted materials and articles amongst coalition participants. It also included 5 weekly gatherings with coalition participants across the country to share best practices and emerging issues. This network proved vital for organizations where only one or two staff were leading outreach activities and who could access ideas, insights and materials from other organizations.



IMPACT

Despite challenges, in just over six weeks, the Exchange grew the Canadian VOTE Coalition by **25%** with **94 NEW ORGANIZATIONS** from across Canada signing on. The campaign ignited a national coalition of over community based organizations and civic leaders in **OVER 20** towns, cities, and regions, from Dartmouth to Iqaluit to Vancouver.

The Exchange's resources, tools and trainings proved valuable information and access to networks to community-based organizations across the country. It served as a central hub for organizations to learn best practices, receive latest news and materials, provide shared resources in a rapidly shifting election landscape, and strengthen democratic engagement across the community sector.

COALITION CHAMPIONS



ELECTION READINESS TRAINING

In the lead up to the election, The Exchange organized and delivered virtual training sessions to community-based organizations and local leaders across the country. Over 400 community leaders were trained through 10 training sessions. This was an important capacity-building initiative for staff across Canada.

The training sessions were offered to members of community-based organizations to equip them with the tools and resources needed for non-partisan voter outreach and engagement. In these sessions, participants learned the ins and outs of non-partisan voter outreach, including why some people don't vote and how to engage those voters in creative and effective ways. They learned how to demystify the voting process through activity-based discussion and social media campaigns. After the training session, participants received a virtual toolkit that included voter-engagement resources and tools, as well as relevant info sheets and materials from Elections Canada.

The Exchange heard time and time again that the training sessions were incredibly helpful and made staff at community-based organizations feel confident in organizing voter outreach activities. In a post-event survey XX of respondents reported [insert finding]. In addition, the training sessions

were a networking opportunity for communitybased organizations to meet other like-minded leaders who are passionate about voter engagement in their communities.



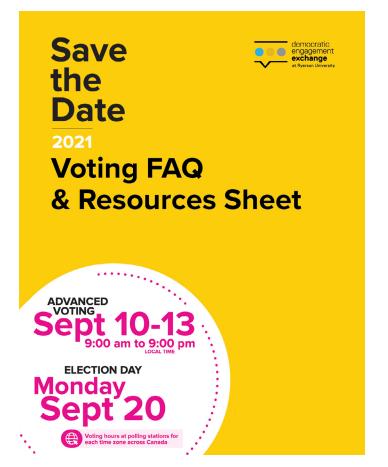
"In a year with a snap election, it was critical to access resources created by The Democratic Engagement Exchange in order to conduct our voter outreach and engagement activities. The Election Readiness Training helped build staff capacity to lead non-partisan engagement efforts despite the challenging circumstances of this election."

- YMCA Canada

THE POWER IS OURS: VOTER ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH HANDBOOK

In addition to virtual trainings, The Exchange produced a Voter Engagement & Outreach Handbook. The handbook prepared community sector staff and local leaders with all the information they would need to engage first-time and infrequent voters and demystify the voting process.

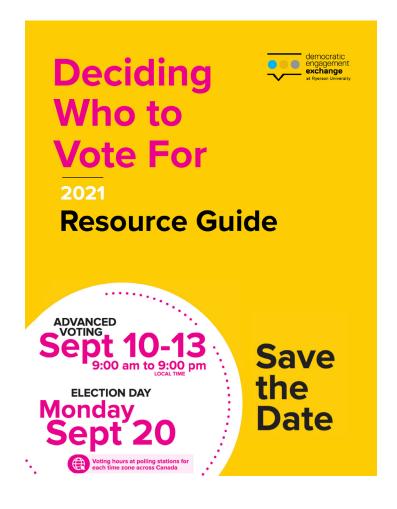
It included voter outreach and engagement best practices, tips on engaging first-time and infrequent voters, plain language answers to common election related questions, and links to important Elections Canada materials and easy-to-use print outs. The handbook also included a portion on hosting a Vote PopUp, available to those in regions where health and safety guidelines permitted in-person activities





In addition to the detailed handbook, The Exchange produced a quick reference three-page handout summarizing content from the handbook to meet the immediate needs of community members. This included direct links to relevant Elections Canada materials and FAQs about the election like "Who is on the ballot?" "Where do I turn for reliable information about the Election?" "What ID do I need to vote?" These are common questions for first time and infrequent voters but for many there has not been one engaging and easy to understand source to answer these questions. The Exchange produced both designed and plain text versions for staff.

"DECIDING WHO TO VOTE FOR RESOURCE" GUIDE



What is the difference between the parties and candidates?

How do I know who has the best policies?

These questions can be the most difficult questions for new and infrequent voters and often act as an impediment to any form of participation. As a consequence, The Exchange produced the Deciding Who To Vote For Resource Guide based on a curated selection of trusted non-partisan accessible resources to help voters access where each party stood on a range of issues from immigration policy to COVID-19 response and recovery.



"The Canadian VOTE Coalition played a key role in supporting Access Alliance's voter engagement activities. Joining the Coalition allowed us to connect with others who were doing similar work around the country and provided many opportunities to share information. The Election Readiness Training and the Vote Outreach and Engagement Handbook provided us with key information to create and facilitated workshops and the graphics and sharable resources were very informative and easy to share with community members, specially youth." -Access Alliance

DIGITAL OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT





Recognizing that most community organizations had switched their focus to digital outreach, The Exchange produced a series of sharadable graphics and video resources for organizations and local leaders to use on their social media accounts, e-newsletters and other communications channels. Aimed at new and infrequent voters with the goal of demystifying the voting process, these assets were simple, colourful and fun. The key messages were voting is easy, safe and secure and voters have many options about ways to vote.

The graphics and videos were hosted on the The Exchanges' 2021 <u>Federal Election webpage</u> and included vertical and square versions of videos and graphics optimized for popular social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Included with

each graphic and video was sample social media language that organizations could modify to fit their audience and needs. Included in the sample language were links to relevant Elections Canada information, as well as the Exchange's content. The Exchange engaged Canadian VOTE Coalition Champion partners to distribute this content through their communications channels and networks. Organizations such as YMCA Canada, Social Planning Toronto, Community Food Centres of Canada and Civic Action shared these resources as original content on their own social media platforms, as well as promoted shared resources amongst their subsidiary organizations.

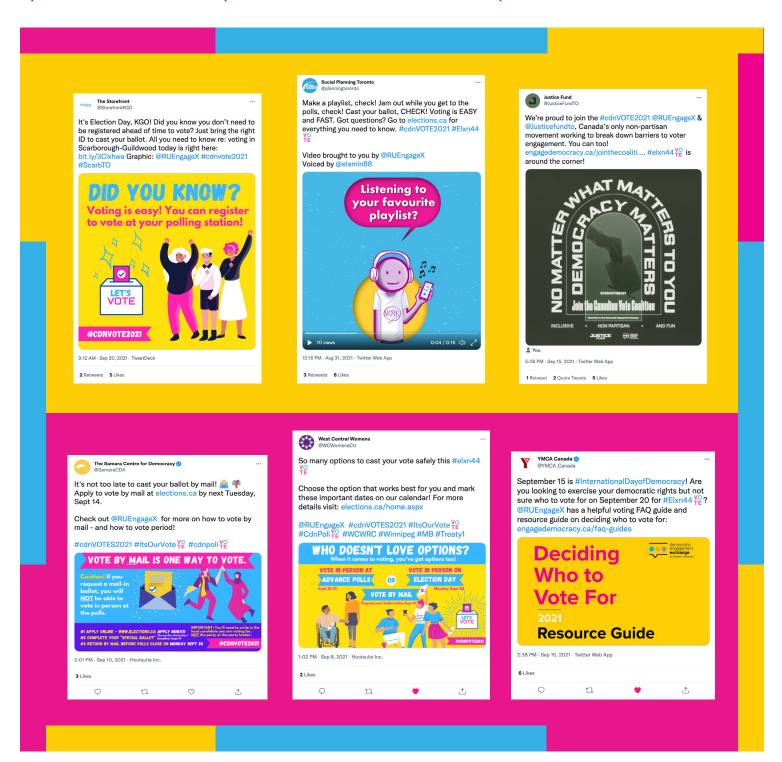




In addition to sharing with our Coalition partners, The Exchange distributed the videos and graphics through its own communication channels, including e-newsletters and social media. Highlights of The Exchange's communications strategy included:

30 E-NEWSLETTERS TO OUR NETWORK OF OVER 2,500 SUBSCRIBERS

3,700 WEBSITE VISITS | 250,000+ SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS | 2,900+ SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS



2021 FEDERAL ELECTION RESOURCE HUB

The Exchange created an online Federal Election Resource Hub at www.engagedemocracy.ca/2021-federal-election.



THE WEBSITE INCLUDED:

- Canadian VOTE Coalition Sign Up
- Voter Engagement and Outreach Handbook
- **Election FAQ Guides**
- Decided Who To Vote For Resource Package
- **Election Readiness 101 Trainings**
- Digital Video and Graphic Shareables with Sample Social Media Posts
- Sample E-Newsletter Content
- Vote PopUp Registration
- Highlights of Elections Canada Resources
- **Elections Job Promotion**











VOTE POPUP



Due to COVID-19 health and safety restrictions and the short election period, many community organizations were unable to hold in-person Vote PopUp activities and turned to digital strategies and tactics.

However, 13 organizations across Canada requested Vote PopUp kits to host 34 events and engage 1,435 community members.

In-person Vote PopUp activities demystifies the voting process and connects voters' concerns about issues that matter to them to the election through engaging participants in discussions about the issues that matter to them. Vote PopUps accomplish this by creating a simulated polling place complete with ballot boxes and voting screens, inviting participants to vote on issues that matter to them and finally asking participants why they think voting is important.

"With the support of Democratic Engagement Exchange, we held 4 vote pop-ups at food banks across northern Toronto during the federal election. Democratic Engagement Exchange's vote pop-up kit made it easy to engage our community members in the voting process in the context of our regular food bank programming."

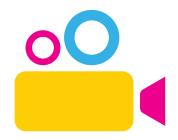
-Chiara Padovani, Community Advocacy and Agency Relations Manager, North York Harvest Food Bank

One clear learning from the 2021 federal election is that regardless of digital capacity and activities, the most effective way to engage new and in-frequent voters is through in-person activities. These events, such as Vote PopUp both meet people where they are and provide a programmatic component for community organizations.

MEDIA

Our Vote 2021 campaign and the Exchange's director, John Beebe were featured in 33 election news stories including coverage by CBC The National, CBC Ontario Morning, The Globe and Mail, CTV, Global TV, 680 AM, Bloomberg Business News and The Toronto Star. This coverage had a total reach of 137 million Canadian and an advertising value equivalent of \$1.28 million...





FEATURED IN:





























MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

HOW TO PREVENT THE RISE OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC FORCES,

Op-Ed by John Beebe, The Toronto Star, September 13, 2021

PANDEMIC ADDS TO DELAYED **ELECTION RESULTS,**

Long Polling Station Lines, CBC The National, September 21, 2021

WHAT'S BEHIND LOW VOTER **TURNOUT IN CANADA'S ELECTION? EXPERTS SEEK ANSWERS.**

Global News,

September 21, 2021

ELECTIONS CANADA WARNS OF PROBLEMS, DELAYS AHEAD OF **VOTING DAY,**

The Globe & Mail, **September 15, 2021**

WE NEED TO INVEST IN **DEMOCRATIC INFRASTRUCTURE:** CANADIAN VOTE COALITION,

BNN Bloomberg,

August 13, 2021

XU VOTES

XU Votes was a campaign that built awareness of opportunities for students to vote in the 2021 Federal Election. Despite the pandemic election impacting students physically visiting campus and suspension of on-campus voting, XU Votes produced a best-in-class virtual all-candidates debate, engaged students through digital outreach, and garnered local and national media attention, including the Toronto Star and Global National News.

HERE



The initiative collaborated with a variety of student organizations across campus to increase the scope of their reach to better engage student voters and provide important information on where, when, and ways to vote. Given the suspension of the on-campus voting program due to COVID-19, this outreach was vital. XU Votes filled the gaps that may discourage students from casting their votes. The digital campaign, "My voice matter" engaged students to explain in short videos why they are voting and the importance of casting their ballot.



ALL-CANDIDATES DEBATE

In collaboration with the Politics and the Governance Student Association of Ryerson University and the Democratic Engagement Exchange and The Faculty of Arts. We hosted a virtual candidates debate for Ryerson students and the Toronto Centre community. The debate highlighted the four candidates for Toronto Centre (The Green Party Leader and Candidate Annamie Paul, The NDP Candidate Brian Chang, and The Liberal Candidate MP Marci len, and The Conservative Candidate Ryan Lester).





This student-led debate was moderated by Martin Regg Cohn, a visiting practitioner in the Faculty of Arts and political columnist with The Toronto Star. Students were able to ask questions on issues that matter to them such as climate change, changing Ryerson name, truth and reconciliation, housing affordability, mental health, and more.

"Collectively, it was a virtuoso virtual performance by all the players — not least the debate's official host, Hanen Nanaa, head of the campus Politics and Governance Students' Association (POGSA), working with XU Votes and the Democratic Engagement Exchange. Before handing over the microphone, I mentioned my own experience watching people overseas dying for democracy during my time as a foreign correspondent — and saw Nanaa nodding her head knowingly."

Moderating a debate in Toronto Centre, I saw a better kind of politics, The Toronto Star, Martin Regg Cohn

[https://www.thestar.com/politics/political-opinion/2021/09/03/moderating-a-debate-in-toronto-centre-i-saw-a-better-kind-of-politics.html]





CONCLUSION

Canada's 44th federal election was unlike any other election in Canada's history. According to preliminary estimates voter turnout was 62.25%. This is lower than the last two elections but higher than most elections held over the past 20 years. It also means that over 10 million Canadians who were eligible to vote didn't. There is no one factor that determines voter turnout in any election but research consistently shows that in Canada first time voters consistently overestimate how difficult it is to vote. During the 2019 federal election, it took only seven minutes for the average voter to vote on election day. While we don't yet have firm data on how long it took to vote in 2021, we do know that many voters had to wait far longer.

In future elections, new voters are likely to recall reports of long lines and complex safety protocols when considering whether to vote. It is critical that community based organizations and post-secondary institutions have the tools and training they need to engage their community and demystify the voting process. This will take a concerted effort by funders, Elections Canada and organizations like the Democratic Engagement Exchange.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: ELECTION READINESS TRAININGS & EVENTS

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DATE	SESSION
June 24, 2021	Elections 101 Training
July 13, 2021	Decisions, Debates, Democracy?
July 20, 2021	Elections 101 Training
July 20, 2021	Elections 101 Training - CASA
August 3, 2021	Elections 101 Training
August 10, 2021	Elections 101 Training
August 10, 2021	Elections 101 Training - Evening
August 19, 2021	Elections 101 - Social Media Edition
August 24, 2021	Elections 101 Training
August 25, 2021	Elections 101 Training - YMCA
August 31, 2021	Elections 101 Training
September 8, 2021	Ask Us Anything Q&A Session

APPENDIX 3: LIST OF COALITION ORGANIZATIONS

	SAMZANONS		
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CHAI	MPIONS:	•	
1.	Samara Canada		
2.	The North Grove	•	
3.	Operation Black Vote		
4.	Canadian Arab Institute		
5.	CASA	•	
6.	Social Planning Toronto		
7.	Civic Action	•	
8.	The Canadian Muslim Vote	•	•
9.	YWCA		
10.	Feed Ontario		
11.	Proud Politics		
12.	YMCA	•	
13.	Community Food Centres Canada	•	
14.	Justice Fund	•	
15.	ABC Life Literacy		
16.	CIJA		
		•	
		•	
		•	•

2021 CANADIAN VOTE COALITION PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS:

Access Alliance		
Adjacent Furniture	•	
Afghan Youth Engagement and Development Initiative	•	•
Apathy is Boring		
Auxiliary of Hillel Lodge		
Basic Income Canada Youth Network		
BIPOC TV & Film		
Brain Injury Canada	•	
Brock University Student's Union	•	
Bul-Bul Press		
BUSU		
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association	•	
Calgary Scope	•	
Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty	•	•
Canadian Arab Institute		•
Canadian Federation of Students		
Canadian International Council		
Canadian Women's Chamber of Commerce		
Carrefour Jeunesse-Emploi Montréal Centre-ville		•
CAWI-IVTF		•

Chairs and Tables Citizen Action Group Citoyenne Jeunesse City Hive City of Burlington / Region of Halton CJE Mirabel Community Climate Council CRE CWAV Daily Bread Food Bank Deloitte Democracy Education Network Disability Action Hall Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française For Youth Initiative Gen Squeeze Green Ummah Halifax Public Libraries Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion Hart House Housline & Mainstay Community Housing Innisfil ideaLAB & Library Lace-Up Initiative	Centre for Independent Living in Toronto		
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Housline & Mainstay Community Housing Innisfil ideaLAB & Library	Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion		
Innisfil ideaLAB & Library	Hart House	•	
	Housline & Mainstay Community Housing		•
Lace-Up Initiative	Innisfil ideaLAB & Library		
	Lace-Up Initiative		

Moorelands Kids			
New Canadians Centre Peterborough			
North Bay and District Multicultural Center			
North Point Douglas Women's Centre			
North Shore Community Resources			
North Vancouver City Library			
North York Harvest Food Bank			
OCASI	•		
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants			
Ontario Non Profit Network			
OPYC-OCJ			
PagerDuty			
Parkdale Residents Association			
Peel Multicultural Council			
Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre			•
RD Polytechnique			
Red Deer College			
Rexdale Community Hub			
Scarborough Campus Student Union			
SEAS Centre			
SEED Winnipeg			•
SFU's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue		•	•
Sandy Hill CHC			
Shine Through the Rain Foundation			

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Sustainable Mississauga		
The Depot Community Food Centre		
The Local Community Food Centre		
The Mississauga Food Bank	•	
The Neighbourhood Group		
The North Grove		
The Stop Community Food Centre		
The West Central Women's Resource Centre Inc.		
Toronto District School Board	•	
Toronto EMS	•	
Toronto History Museums		
Trinity Bellwoods Community Association		
UJA Toronto		
United Way Centraide Canada		
University of Victoria Students Society		•
Wilfrid Laurier University Students' Union	•	•
Women In Need Society		
Words with Wings Communications		
Working Women Community Centre		
YMCA of Saskatoon		
YWCA Hamilton		•
YWCA Toronto		

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