

Q/A for Webinar on Municipal Elections:

“Inside the Civic Chamber: Insights from Municipal Leaders on Serving and Running for Office”

May 29, 2024

Question 1: I would like an example or explanation of the ways you could be disqualified from running for council with the “school board”? Does this mean temp employees, full time employees, management or where there is no “board”? How is that determined?

Answer from NSFM staff: In Nova Scotia, municipal elections and school board elections are both governed by [the Municipal Election Act \(1989\)](#). Grounds for disqualification are found in Section 18 of this Act. These grounds include:

- Being a judge, senator, or member of another elected assembly, municipal council, or village commission;
- Being convicted of bribery, a corrupt practice, or disqualified from any office pursuant to the provisions of the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, within five years prior to nomination day;
- Being an employee of the municipality, or any utility, board, commission, committee or official, to which remuneration of any kind is received from the municipality, unless the person is on a leave of absence pursuant to Section 17C of the Municipal Elections Act.
- **Subsection 18 (d) (ii) states that a leave of absence is not required for people who hold an office or employment with a school board*.**

When a candidate is registering to run in an election, they will complete nomination papers that include an Oath and Consent section. This oath states the candidate is eligible to run in the election in question to the best of their knowledge. A municipal Chief Returning Officer will ensure all necessary parts of the nomination paper are filled out but the onus of ensuring eligibility is on the candidate themselves. If information to the contrary is identified, the candidate will be deemed disqualified.

A candidate can only run for one office (i.e.: mayor, councillor, school board member) at a time, as set out Section 47 of the Municipal Elections Act.

*It’s important to note that “school board” in Nova Scotia refers only to the provincial Acadian school board/*Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial* (CSAP). CSAP is governed by an elected board of 18 members representing the 10 regions in which CSAP schools are located.

For more information on how elections work in your municipality or CSAP, you can visit your municipality’s website, contact the Clerk of your municipality, or review general provincial information [here](#).

Municipal Returning Officers also administer CSAP school board elections in their municipalities. However, because many school board electoral districts spread across more than one municipality, one of the municipal Returning Officers in the school board electoral district acts as the Returning Officer for the school board election in that electoral district. Therefore, some CSAP school board candidates will find that the returning officer with whom they must file their nomination papers is in a different municipality. These Returning Officers are also a useful source of information for aspiring candidates and can be contacted with the help of your municipality’s Clerk.

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Question 2: What strategies do you employ to connect broadly with your constituents?

Answer from Panelist 1: I went from door to door, used social media and used the same message at every stop that at that particular time dealt with the issues of the day during the campaign. Following that, I remained in touch through community meetings and events, as well as followed their social media pages.

Answer from Panelist 2: Immediately after being elected, I set up a public “Warden’s Page” on Facebook because so many constituents in our County use that particular platform. I have a personal Facebook profile which I often use to share things I post to that page. I’m also present on LinkedIn, Insta and X – but use them less frequently because the majority of people who reach me through social media do so through Facebook. However, I think the most impactful way I connect as Warden is by showing up in-person in communities for events and activities – people appreciate the show of support and often comment that it’s not something they saw often in the leadership position for our County. It’s a balance though – carving out a personal space on social media vs. a political one, and carving out down time vs. showing up for communities, especially on precious weekends! Especially with a full-time job at NSCC in addition to my duties as Councillor and Warden, finding a balance that works has been key to not burning out.

Questions 3: What type of team members did you have when you first were trying to get elected?

Answer from Panelist 1: Team members consisted of someone to coordinate where and when was the best time to be in certain communities for events and to door knocking, a group of individuals from the communities to keep track of who confirmed support and on election day this group worked to make sure the voter got out and cast their ballot

Answer from Panelist 2: I had never run in an election before 2020, so it was all new to me. First, I ended up assembling a team of about 20 people who had a combination of political experience and community connections – most were a generation or two ahead of me, so it really helped me connect with our extensive senior population. In the end, we ran a campaign much like a provincial one – in fact I even remember being criticized for putting in too much effort by one detractor! I had volunteers working at a variety of tasks – pounding signs in the ground, sharing information that I would post online and hard copy, driving for me while I did house-to-house visits handing out rack cards, working the polling stations on election night, working a central office on election night, etc.

To connect with a younger crowd, I also established a virtual team of a little over 30 people – mostly of young women in our community. The previous Council in Richmond County didn’t have any female representation and had alienated a lot of young women in our communities by not supporting a political leadership school for women in Cape Breton. They were eager to find a champion who would represent their interests at the Council table and who they felt they could trust. They provided excellent advice on all kinds of issues, helped me connect to schools doing mock-elections that I provided information sheets for, and they shared my content widely on social media and often came to my defense when the inevitable misinformation and misogyny arose.

They were incredibly effective teams and I’m so grateful for their help and continued support.

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Question 4: When campaigning door to door, how, if any, did you deal with hostile community members and addressing their concerns?

Answer from Panelist 1: I did run into people who weren't the friendliest, I took the time to explain what I stood for, what I would like to see for change and asked them for their input. In most cases they were much more receptive especially when engaging them in the conversation. For the others, remain respectful and thank each and every person for their time and opinion!!

Answer from Panelist 2: I have to say that I didn't encounter too many hostile people while campaigning. It was all happening at the height of Covid, so there was definitely awkwardness when showing up unannounced at people's doors, but people were extremely welcoming overall. In fact, I found some folks so grateful for the visit, especially seniors, because the stress of social isolation was taking its toll. However, I recall a few stops where people were upset about certain issues that had occurred with previous Councils or their dealings with the County in general. I would always commit to finding out more information and getting back to them – I ended up creating a spreadsheet to track these so I wouldn't forget to follow up. I eventually expanded that tool to capture all kinds of issues, and I still use it today. Given our experience in Richmond County, it was tempting to sometimes immediately lay any missteps at the feet of the previous Council – but I tried not to fall into that trap before finding out more information. Sometimes there are administrative and/or legislative constraints that lead to decisions that leave people upset, or the issue falls under the authority of a different level of government (i.e. road maintenance), so finding out the full picture is important before responding.