NIAGARA FALLS PUBLIC LIBRARY	DATE EFFECTED: July 22, 1985 DATE REVISED: June 24, 2026	USE OF LIBRARY RESOURCES FOR ELECTION PURPOSES POLICY
Associated Documents:		

POLICY STATEMENT

The Niagara Falls Public Library (the Library) supports the principles of intellectual freedom, equitable access to information, democratic participation, and political neutrality. During election periods, the Library will conduct its operations in a manner that is fair and impartial and will not provide any candidate, registered third-party advertiser, political party, or position on a ballot question with an unfair advantage through the use of Library resources, services, facilities, communications, or staff.

The Library will comply with all applicable legislative requirements governing the use of public resources during election periods while continuing to support public access to information and civic engagement.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish rules governing the use of Library resources, facilities, services, communications, and information during election periods.

This policy is intended to preserve public trust, maintain the political neutrality of the Niagara Falls Public Library, ensure compliance with applicable legislation, and provide for the fair and equitable treatment of all candidates, registered third-party advertisers, and political parties.

This policy also supports the Library's obligations under the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (The Act), which requires local boards to establish rules respecting the use of public resources during election campaigns and prohibits contributions to candidates through the provision of money, goods, or services.

SCOPE

This policy applies to members of the Niagara Falls Public Library Board, employees, volunteers, candidates, registered third-party advertisers, political parties, and any other individuals or organizations using Library facilities, services, resources, or information during an election period.

This policy applies to municipal, provincial, and federal elections, including by-elections, and to any question submitted to electors for a vote where applicable.

DEFINITIONS

“**Blackout Period”** – means the temporary period from the day prior to Nomination Day to and including Voting Day in which certain privileges are discontinued for sitting members of Municipal Council and the Mayor;

"Campaigning" – means any activity by or on behalf of a candidate, registered third-party advertiser, political party or question on a ballot meant to elicit support during the election period. Campaigning does not include the appearance of elected officials, other candidates or registered third-party advertisers at an event in their personal capacity without the display of any signage or graphic that identifies the individual as a candidate or registered third-party advertiser(s) and without the solicitation of votes.

"Campaign Materials" – means any materials used to solicit votes for a candidate or question on the ballot in an election period, including, but not limited to: literature, banners, posters, pictures, buttons, clothing, or other paraphernalia. Campaign materials include, but are not limited to: materials in all media, such as print, displays, electronic, radio or television and online sources, including websites or social media.

"Candidate" – means any person who has filed and not withdrawn a nomination for an elected office at the municipal (including school board), provincial or federal level in an election or by-election.

"Contribution" – as defined in the Act:

- For a candidate – means "money, goods and services given to and accepted by a person for his or her election campaign, or given to and accepted by another person who is acting under the person's direction".

- For a registered third-party advertiser – means "money, goods and services given to and accepted by an individual, corporation or trade union in relation to third-party advertisements, or given to and accepted by another person who is acting under the direction of the individual, corporation or trade union".

"Elected Official" – means an individual elected to the House of Commons, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Niagara Falls City Council or a school board.

"Election" – means an election or by-election at the municipal (including school board), provincial and federal level of government, or the submission of a question or by-law to the electors.

"Election Period" – means the official campaign period of an election:

- For a municipal (including school board) election, the election period commences on May 1 of an election year and ends on voting day.

- For a provincial or federal election, the election period commences the day the writ for the election is issued and ends on voting day.

- For a question on the ballot, the period commences the day City Council passes a by-law to put a question to the electorate and ends on voting day.

- For a by-election, the period commences when the by-election is called and ends on voting day.

"Library Information" – means any information in the custody and control of the Library, including databases that may be the repository of names, contact information, business records, financial information or other identifiers compiled and used by library employees to conduct Library business. An example of a library database is the Library patron database.

"Library Infrastructure" – means any physical or technology systems that support the operation of library programs and services, including but not limited to: fleet vehicles, computer network, telecommunications and email system, wireless equipment, computer hardware, software and peripherals, internet and intranet. Excludes public right-of-way including sidewalks, roads, laneways and boulevards.

"Library Resources" – includes but is not limited to library employees, library events, library programs and services (including online services such as online and social media channels), library facilities, library equipment and supplies, library funds, library information and library infrastructure. These are further defined as follows:

“Library Employees" – means all exempt and non-union employees, and members of the bargaining unit.

"Library Events" – means events funded or organized by the Niagara Falls Public Library, including events that may be jointly organized with community organizations and/or with external sponsors. Library events include, but are not limited to: community meetings and consultations, cultural celebrations, and special events. Library events do not include events and meetings organized by third parties, which are not considered library events for the purpose of this policy.

“Library Facilities" – means any facility that is owned or leased by the Niagara Falls Public Library and that is directly

managed and operated by the Library. Library facilities do not include public right-of-ways such as sidewalks, roads and boulevards, laneways or facilities rented in accordance with the Community Space Rental Policy.

"Member of Council" – means the Mayor and Members of Council.

"Political Party" – means political parties for provincial and federal elections that are registered under the Ontario Election Finances Act or in the registry of parties referred to in section 374 of the Canada Elections Act. Under the current legislative framework, political parties cannot participate in municipal elections or by-elections.

"Question on a Ballot" – means any question or by-law submitted to the electors by Council, a school board, an elected local board, or the Minister of Municipal Affairs under the Act.

"Registered Third-Party Advertiser" – means in relation to a municipal election, an individual, corporation or trade union that is registered with the City Clerk, as per section 88.6 of the Act, whose purpose is to promote, support or oppose a candidate for office, or an issue on a question on a ballot, and is not under the direction of a candidate.

"Third-Party Advertisement" – means an advertisement in any broadcast, print, electronic or other medium that has the purpose of promoting, supporting or opposing a candidate for office, or an issue on a question on a ballot, and is not under the direction of a candidate.

"Voting Day" – means the day the final vote is to be taken in an election.

BOARD MEMBERS

- Citizen Board Members of the Library Board must inform the CEO/Chief Librarian immediately if they register to run for office in an election. Citizen Board Members should also contact the City Clerk's Office immediately and abide by City policies which affect Citizen Board Members running for office.

- Councillor Board Members must inform the CEO/Chief Librarian if they are running to become an MP or MPP.

- Library Board Members may engage in political activity, including endorsing or opposing a candidate, political party, or a particular response to a referendum question, but not in a manner that would lead a member of the public to infer that they are acting in their capacity as a Library Board Member or on behalf of the Library.

LIBRARY EMPLOYEES

- Library employees shall not campaign for, support, or oppose a candidate, registered third-party advertiser, political party, or position on a ballot question while performing their duties or while representing the Library.

- Library employees shall not use Library resources, facilities, services, information, equipment, communications systems, or their position with the Library for election-related purposes.

- Library employees shall not represent personal political views as those of the Library.

ACCESS TO LIBRARY FACILITIES DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD

- Library facilities and Library infrastructure may not be used for any election-related purpose by a candidate, registered third-party advertiser or political party. In particular, signs may not be erected or displayed on a facility that is owned or operated by the Library.

- Candidates, registered third-party advertisers or political parties in an election cannot use the facilities, equipment, supplies, programs and services (including online services, social media, and email), staff, or other resources of the Library for any election campaign or campaign-related activities (except for facilities rented in accordance with the Community Space Rental Policy).

- All-candidate meetings may be held at Library facilities for a nominal fee or other consideration provided that all candidates for an office are invited to attend such meetings.

- Candidates, registered third-party advertisers or political parties may not distribute campaign materials on or in library facilities or at library events.

- Candidates, registered third-party advertisers or political parties cannot undertake campaign-related activities on Library property (except for facilities rented in accordance with the Community Space Rental Policy). The Library will not permit the display and distribution of materials primarily political in nature (including election campaign materials) on library property.

ACCESS TO LIBRARY RESOURCES DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD

- The Library's logo, crest, slogans, or other intellectual property may not be printed, posted or distributed on any election-related campaign materials or included on any election-related website.

- Candidates may not post photographs of themselves with Library employees in uniform, including badges.

- Photographic or video materials that have been or may be created by library employees or with library resources may not be used for any election purpose or in campaign materials.

- Websites or domain names that are funded by the Library may not include any campaign materials, make reference to and identify any individual as a candidate, registered third-party advertiser or political party or profile any slogan or symbol associated with a candidate, registered third-party advertiser or political party.

ACCESS TO LIBRARY INFORMATION DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD

- Information provided to one candidate, registered third-party advertiser or political party that is of a general nature and may provide valuable guidance to all others will be provided to all candidates, registered third-party advertisers or political parties. The Library will post the information on the internet or through other mechanisms to ensure equal access to information.

- Requests by a candidate, registered third-party advertiser or political party for personal meetings with the CEO/Chief Librarian or Board Members, as well as requests for tours of library facilities may not always be accommodated due to resource and time constraints. If a meeting or a tour is organized, the Library will organize a similar meeting or tour for any other candidate, registered third-party advertiser or political party, upon request.

- Library databases may not be used by any candidate, registered third-party advertiser or political party, unless the database has already been released for public use.

ATTENDING LIBRARY EVENTS DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD

- Candidates, registered third-party advertisers or political parties are permitted to attend library events, or events held at library facilities, in either their capacity as elected representatives or as private citizens, but may not campaign while in attendance. No election signs may be posted and no campaign materials may be disseminated at Library events.

- Elected officials are permitted to attend library-organized events or events held on library facilities and act as ceremonial participants in their capacity as elected officials, including speaking at the event and partaking in ceremonial activities.

RESTRICTIONS TO SERVICES PROVIDED TO MEMBERS OF COUNCIL DURING BLACKOUT PERIOD

- Members of Council may also be candidates in a municipal election. Accordingly, during the blackout period in the municipal election year, the Library will discontinue the following activities, irrespective of whether they are seeking election in the new term or not.
    - All forms of advertising and communication, including publications and social media accounts, that are operated or distributed by the Library will not reference the name or image of a Member of Council.
    - Signage for library events, including banners and posters, will not reference the name of a Member of Council.
    - The Library's media releases or materials will not reference the name of a Member of Council. Where the Library would typically name a specific Member of Council or the Mayor in its communications or media materials, it will make reference to the generic term "Councillor Ward XX" or "Mayor of Niagara Falls" without naming the specific Member of Council. This practice will be used for all library programs, events, and announcements.

PROMOTING ELECTIONS

Nothing in this policy prohibits the Library from promoting awareness of or providing information on elections as long as no particular candidate, registered third-party advertiser or political party is promoted, supported or opposed at the event. This includes promoting awareness of activities or events in which all candidates in an election are invited to attend.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The CEO/Chief Librarian is responsible for the implementation of this policy.

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