



## IN FIVE MINUTES: COMMUNITY LEAGUES AND ELECTIONS

Community Leagues must remain non partisan during elections. The perception and reality of the impartiality of Leagues is absolutely central to their wellbeing.

Given 2021 is shaping up to be the year of elections, with municipal and federal elections as well as a Senate vote and several referendum questions from the province, we've created a quick guide to help you navigate the most difficult questions. This guide is partially constructed using feedback from Leagues during an *Ask Me Anything* session on Leagues and elections.

Note: From our bylaws: ***“Each League should conduct its business in a manner that is open, ethical, in compliance with its Bylaws, and which avoids a perceived conflict of interest.”***

### 1. WHO'S RUNNING?

A list of municipal candidates running in Edmonton is available [here](#).

A list of candidates running in the Edmonton ridings for the federal election is [here](#).

### 2. IF OUR LEAGUE HOSTS AN ALL-CANDIDATES FORUM, HOW DO WE ASK GOOD QUESTIONS THAT AREN'T PARTISAN?

All-candidate forums should be constructed as just that – all candidates must be invited to participate.

Questions should be framed for the community. It's about issues, not personalities or parties. What are the issues that your Community League is concerned about? Ask each candidate open-ended questions that prompt conversation. Avoid closed-ended (yes, no) and leading questions (pushing for a specific answer) as they can shut down discussion. Aim for fairness and to eliminate bias. Ask an array of questions rather than focusing on just one issue.



### 3. IF OUR LEAGUE HOSTS AN ALL-CANDIDATES FORUM, HOW DO WE FIND A MODERATOR THAT WON'T BRING BIAS OR PARTISANSHIP?

This is complex and difficult – which makes it a great question. Moderators can be perceived to be biased by those in attendance. Care should be taken, then, to find professional moderators who have a track record of work that's public, unbiased and non partisan. Consider moderators who are former journalists or people who work as consultants in public speaking, conflict resolution or otherwise are comfortable working with audiences, political candidates and speakers. Ask moderators to disclose if they are in any way connected to any campaign. If you'd like our help, email [communications@efcl.org](mailto:communications@efcl.org).

### 4. UNDERSTANDING THE WAY IT ALL WORKS – POLITICS 101

Candidates are sometimes not the greatest at explaining what they might or might not be able to do if elected. Political jurisdiction in Canada is hard for even the experts to agree on, but there are some general concepts that can help you and your League navigate the conversation during elections. Here are four quick ideas:

**Idea one: Mayors in Canada are known as weak mayors.** What this means is that the mayor is but one vote on a council. The mayor is the leader, yes, but is only capable of creating policies through collaborating with their council. A mayoral candidate can promise things but winning an election is but one of many steps. A mayor must work with their council to enact their vision. Read more [here](#).

**Idea two: Jurisdiction matters.** Candidates in municipal races may discuss policies about which they will have little power to change if elected. Conversely, candidates in provincial or federal races may avoid discussion of jurisdictional responsibility even though it fully or partially falls on their shoulders. As cities grow in power, size and influence, higher orders of governments are downloading services and responsibilities onto them and their tax base, covered through property taxes. A good question for candidates is to ask them if they have the jurisdiction to make good on their promises if elected.

**Idea three: Big ideas often meet reality.** Candidates in municipal elections can offer big ideas and grand visions. If you've spent time at city council meetings, however, you'll note the vast



majority of council discussions are about land use and navigating disputes over development and redevelopment of land. A good question for candidates is to spell out how they will enact their visions.

**Idea four: Who's backing who?** Municipal candidates are for the most part non partisan. This is gradually shifting in Alberta. It can help to ask candidates to be transparent about who is backing them, especially third-party advertisers, real-estate developers and political-action committees.

## **FINALLY: LEAGUE HALLS MUST BE NON PARTISAN, TOO**

It's simple: League halls shouldn't be used for events or purposes that are linked to campaigns. The only workaround on this is if the League allows the hall to be used by all candidates equally.