



A CHANCE TO BUILD BACK BETTER

Food Banks Canada Federal
Election 2021 Toolkit



WHY THIS ELECTION IS SO IMPORTANT

In March of 2019 there were over 1 million visits to food banks because people needed help to feed themselves and their families.

One year later, as the COVID-19 pandemic began its spread throughout the country, food banks acted as a first response to the drastic economic downturn caused by the biggest health crisis this country has faced in over a century.

In a matter of weeks, 52% of food banks reported initial increases in their visitors and over 15% of food banks reported this growth was beyond 50%.

All of this revealing a painful truth that food banks have known for years - millions of Canadians are just a quick economic shift away from relying on a food bank to help feed themselves and their families.

Fortunately, as food banks struggled to meet the need in their communities, a silver lining emerged with federal and provincial government supports quickly introduced in April to mitigate the economic damage caused by the pandemic. Important government supports such as the CERB, the boost to the Canada Child Benefit, and provincial boosts to social assistance resulted in a stabilization in visits to many food banks after the initial bump. And for those who did not have access to these supports while their incomes remained far below the poverty line, food banks in every community across the country kept their doors open, as they always do, to ensure that no one went hungry.

By June 2020, 53% of food banks reported overall decreases. This stabilization of food bank use, while still unacceptably high, persisted through the duration of the CERB and other emergency supports.

The evidence is clear, when incomes are sufficient, Canadians will focus on buying necessities like food - and their need for food banks in the long term is reduced.



A Chance for Change

We know that federal politicians are in a unique position to make the long-term policy changes that will reduce food insecurity across Canada.

While some positive steps have been made since March 2020 (temporarily) and over the last few years, much more still needs to be done if we hope to build back better.

The 2021 Federal Election is an opportunity to influence the political discourse, and to call for real and positive change that will reduce the need for food banks over the long term.

More than one year later however, many food banks across the country are seeing their numbers creep up as emergency benefits wind down.

Canada finds itself at a crossroads as we head into this federal election, and it has a clear choice to make: do we return to a Canada where food banks see more than a million visits a month and where millions live on the edge of needing a food bank, or do we choose to build a more resilient Canada with social policies that leave no one behind?

CONTENTS

Why This Election Is So Important	2
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SEC I. WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE THE ELECTION

Introduction	4
What We Can Achieve.....	4
Our Call To Action.....	5
Key Information About Hunger In Canada	6

SEC II. WHAT YOUR ORGANIZATION CAN DO DURING THE FEDERAL ELECTION

Using Social Media To Talk About The Election	7
Inform And Educate Your Federal Election Candidates.....	8
Invite Election Candidates To Visit Your Organization.....	9
Host A Candidate’s Debate.....	10
General Guidelines: Rules And Regulations For Charities During The Election...11	
Additional Resources	12
Contact Information	12

SEC III. TOOLS / APPENDICES

Tool A – Information Package Template.....	13
Tool B – Federal Election Debate Set-Up/Timeline	14
Tool C – The Debate Format	15
Tool D – Moderator Introduction And Debate Questions	16
Tool E – Food Banks Canada Policy Recommendations.....	18
Tool F – Sample Media Alert	19
Tool G – Online Party Platform Monitor	20
Tool H – Candidate Questionnaire	21
Tool I – Interactive Federal Riding Data Map	22

The opportunity for the food banking network

Within weeks, Canadians will go to the polls to decide who forms the next federal government.

We know that federal politicians are in a unique position to make the long-term policy changes that will reduce food insecurity across Canada.

While some positive steps have been made since March 2020 (temporarily) and over the last few years, much more still needs to be done if we hope to build back better.



The 2021 federal election is a unique opportunity for the food banking network to influence the political discourse, and to call for real and positive change that will reduce the need for food banks over the long term.

Perhaps more than ever before, food banks across the country have been thrown into the public eye as pillars in their communities. Not only are food banks there to support people in the hardest times, but they are also a pulse on the health of the country and can play an important role in shaping it in the future.

The dominant narrative in this election will question how Canada can build back better. Each party and candidate will be trying to show that their plans are best suited to revitalize the economic and social spheres.

This guide provides your food bank with tools to participate in the democratic process, and to help you bring the issues that matter to you, and those we support, into the electoral debate. As a member of the food bank network, you are a first-hand witness to the impacts and trends that underline food insecurity. You carry a valuable perspective which, along with the tools in this document, can be used to further our common goal of reducing poverty and food bank use across Canada.

What we can achieve during the 2021 Federal Election

The food bank network includes thousands of people and organizations in communities across the country. If we work together during the upcoming election, we can:

- 1** Inform election candidates and the public about food bank use in Canada, and in your community;
- 2** Develop new relationships with candidates running for office in your community;
- 3** Bring increased attention to the root causes of food bank use – which are poverty and low incomes, and;
- 4** Encourage all political parties and candidates to develop and enact real policy proposals to reduce the need for food banks in the future.

OUR CALL TO ACTION



There is little doubt that the 2021 federal election will be unlike any we have seen before. While the partisan nature of the attacks sure to come out during the election will resemble years past, the 2021 election will be a rare opportunity to propose and discuss ideas that can create a stronger Canada than it was prior to the global pandemic.

This election will also dictate whether we revert to a country that allowed over a million food bank visits every month prior to the pandemic, or whether we move towards a future Canada where no one gets left behind.

To that end, our network must be entirely focused on specific policy recommendations that we echo across the country every time we meet a political candidate, community members, and the media - so that our message is clear and understood.

This is why we are encouraging all of our network to consistently speak of the following 5 policy recommendations. While not all 5 will speak to each food bank, speaking on a number of the following issues that best suit the clientele in your area will help to have the greatest impact on those we serve;

5 Policy Recommendations

1 New supports for renters living with low incomes

With rent and housing as the top affordability concern for Canadians, more financial rent support, a stronger and faster housing strategy, and more housing support for those with disabilities is needed.

2 Modernize and expand supports for low-wage and unemployed workers

Our EI system is decades out of date. Canada will need to adapt for a modern workforce and struggling population post-pandemic.

3 Increased supports for low-income single adults

Singles are still an overlooked demographic in Canada. With the pandemic calming, better mental health measures and a stronger social assistance system will be needed if we hope to reduce food bank visits.

4 Progress towards a minimum income floor

With the majority of food bank clients earning income through social assistance, it is clear to see that the current system is grossly inadequate. Efforts must be made to improve the system and give people a fair chance to escape the poverty cycle.

5 Enhancing measures to reduce northern food insecurity

Canada's northern and Indigenous populations have continuously lagged behind the rest of the country when it comes to food security. It's well overdue for this country to find way to improve food security and poverty in the north and among Indigenous Canadians.

See Tool E for a full overview of the 2021 Policy Recommendations



KEY INFORMATION ABOUT HUNGER IN CANADA

The following statistics from *HungerCount 2019* and our *2020 COVID Snapshot* show that food bank use is a reality, or close reality, for far too many people in Canada. This information can help you build your case when informing candidates about the need for political parties to act on this issue.

Canadians visited food banks over

1 million

times in March of 2019.

At the onset of the pandemic,

52%

of food banks reported an increase in visitors. By June, due to pandemic supports, that reversed to 53% reporting declines.

34%

of people helped by food banks are children, whereas they are only 20% of the general population.

Single adult households represent

48%

of households accessing food banks, yet they only make up 28% of the general population.

1 in 8

are employed and still can't make ends meet.

57%

of those accessing food banks are on social assistance or disability-related incomes.

70%

of food bank users live in market rental housing.

While these figures paint a portrait of the national situation, it is also important for you to **use your own local information** to inform the candidates and the public about the realities in your region and community. (Visit tool I for stats related to your federal riding)

USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO TALK ABOUT THE ELECTION

Most, if not all, politicians these days use social media as part of their communications and elections strategies. Here are some common guidelines if you are considering using social media to engage in the election, and promote the network's policy recommendations:

DO'S

- Have a clear, targeted message.
- Create a plan for what you want to communicate before you start – and stick to the plan.
- Its all about the policy: you **can** talk about specific policy ideas and suggest policies that you feel would be positive for your community.
- Bring your organization's unique message into the policy narrative. Considering using stories and stats that are specific to your area to engage and relate your audience with these larger policy asks. (Visit tool I for stats related to your federal riding)
- When posting on social media, please use **#NoHunger**, **#CDNpoli** and **#elxn44** to connect your posts to the bigger national conversation.

DON'TS

- As a charity, you cannot pick one candidate or one party over another. Everything you write must always be neutral. The Canada Revenue Agency increases its monitoring during the election period and charities can face stiff penalties if they make partisan statements during an election.
- Be wary of sharing other's posts and linking your content to political articles.
- You **can't** explicitly endorse a candidate or a party, even if they say they support similar policies.



Food Banks Canada will be providing social media shareables and messaging examples with the network once we get closer to the election period.

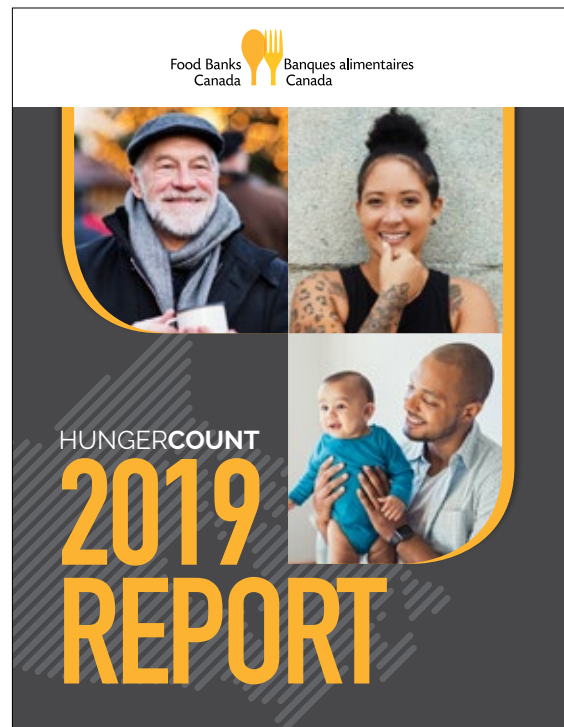
If you have any doubt about what you are posting during or before the campaign, please consult with Isaac Smith, Policy and Government Relations Officer, at isaac.smith@foodbankscanada.ca

1 INFORM AND EDUCATE YOUR FEDERAL ELECTION CANDIDATES

Every organization will have a different approach to getting involved in the federal election. One way to get involved is to prepare a package with information about your organization to send to every candidate who is running for office in your area (see Tool A for an example of what to include in your package). This is a simple way to make sure that hunger and food bank use aren't forgotten during the election period.

Here are a few simple tips that may help you as you reach out to your local election candidates:

- Candidates are bombarded with information during an election, so your information package should be as concise and to the point as possible.
- Send the document with a short cover letter to all candidates in your riding and ask for a response. Don't be afraid to follow-up if they are slow to respond.
- You can also download a copy of the [HungerCount 2019](#) (En/Fr) report or the [COVID 2020 Snap Shot](#) report, which provides a national overview of food bank use in Canada.
- Include a copy of our 2021 Federal Policy Recommendations (see Tool E).
- Have hard copies of our policy recommendations ready for members of the media and campaign teams/candidates who may visit your organization spontaneously during the election.



2 INVITE ELECTION CANDIDATES TO VISIT YOUR ORGANIZATION

Another way to increase attention to hunger and food bank use during the election is to invite all of the local candidates to visit you at your location. This offers an opportunity to connect directly with each candidate individually, and to inform them about the issues that matter to you and the people accessing your programs. Further, establishing this relationship with your future Member of Parliament may prove useful in the future.

Here are a few things to consider if you want to invite your federal candidates for a visit during the election:

- Remember to invite all candidates from all major federal parties (Conservative, NDP, Liberal, Green, and Bloc if they have a candidate in your riding). They don't all need to accept, but you must invite each official party to avoid any perceived bias. You could also invite all candidates, rather than limiting invitations to the major parties. Lesser-known candidates may have more freedom to talk about hunger and food bank use as part of their campaign.
 - It is a good idea to send the invitations by email so that you have a record that all major parties were invited.
 - Make sure you are following all the necessary health and safety measures while we continue to work around the pandemic.
 - If your organization has the capacity to do so (and COVID permitting), we recommend that you invite the candidates for a meal while they visit – this gives you a solid period of time to inform each candidate about your work and the issues you face in your community.
 - You could also invite candidates to meet volunteers, help sort food, harvest food, attend a cooking class, or help pack hampers to get a hands-on understanding of your work.
- Make sure that you have prepared an information package and the policy recommendations printed so that the candidate and their campaign team leave the meeting with the information you want them to remember (see Tool A for a template).
 - Don't be afraid to ask questions – this is also a good opportunity to see what the candidates think, and to stimulate some thoughts on some of the difficult decisions they may be tasked with in their future role as a Member of Parliament.
 - Thank them for their time and efforts and let them know you look forward to working with them in the future.



3 HOST A CANDIDATES DEBATE

As in any election, different issues compete with one another in the campaign. In the past, hunger, food bank use, and poverty have been overshadowed by other issues that are raised by mainstream media. This can make it challenging for organizations that are trying to raise substantive social issues that may not be as sensational as other current events.

One way to counter this is to host a candidate's debate at your location, or in partnership with other community organizations, that focus on hunger, poverty, and food bank use.

While a debate can be time-consuming to organize, it is a good way to raise important discussions, to provide an opportunity for the people you serve to have their say, and to increase your organization's profile within your community. The time consumption of the task can be reduced by working with like-minded organizations to host the debate.

If you're feeling pressed on time and resources, a helpful alternative is to develop a candidate questionnaire which can contain many of the same questions (see Tool H).

During the 2021 federal election, Food Banks Canada is focusing its efforts on supporting and working directly with food banks and provincial associations that wish to host election debates. We can help you plan a debate, contact the major political parties, communicate to the public, and help you manage media interest.

For helpful information on setting up your debate – see Tools B, C and D at the end of this document



If you would like support to host an election debate, please contact Isaac Smith or Phil Ozga, at isaac.smith@foodbankscanada.ca or phil@foodbankscanada.ca

GENERAL GUIDELINES: RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR CHARITIES DURING THE ELECTION

There are many things your organization can do during the election period to help bring attention to hunger and food bank use. However, since your organization is a registered charity, there are some very strict and important guidelines that you must follow during the election, including the following:

- Your organization, and any representatives speaking on behalf of the organization, **cannot publicly endorse or oppose** a specific candidate or a specific political party.
- Your organization **cannot** post any posters or literature (e.g. online or at your location), or issue public statements in support of or in opposition to a specific candidate or a specific political party.
- Individuals associated with your organization (employees, board of directors, volunteers, etc.) **can** assist political candidates or parties in a personal capacity. However, they **cannot** link this work to the work of your organization in any way.
- If you host a debate during the election period, all candidates from the three major federal political parties (Conservative, NDP and Liberal) **must** be invited to participate. They do not need to agree to participate, but they must be invited. It is a good idea to also invite the Green candidates and any other major party with a candidate in your riding.
- If you invite one candidate to visit your organization (e.g. for a tour, a meal, etc.), you **must** invite the other candidates from each of the major federal political parties. The visits do not need to happen at the same time, and not all candidates need to visit, but candidates from all major parties must be invited to visit.
- In general, all candidates from the three major federal political parties must be given the same opportunity (time, visibility, exposure) to participate in any event that you are hosting or closely involved in.
- Though you are not required to do this, you may wish to include candidates from other political parties (e.g. Green Party of Canada) in your activities.
- When a political party or candidate supports a policy that is also supported by your organization, you may promote the policy but **cannot** directly or indirectly support the political party or candidate.

As a general rule, all activities of your organization during the election period must remain neutral and focused on the policies, and not the candidates or political parties.

When in doubt, please contact Philippe Ozga, Director of Government Relations and Advocacy at phil@foodbankscanada.ca to discuss further.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Elections Canada – www.elections.ca

(for useful information on who the candidates in your riding are)

Conservative Party of Canada – www.conservative.ca

New Democratic Party of Canada – www.ndp.ca

Liberal Party of Canada – www.liberal.ca

Green Party of Canada – www.greenparty.ca

CONTACT INFORMATION

There is no doubt that things change very quickly during an election period and there are always many moving parts. However, as we lead up to the election (and any time during the election period itself), please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or if there are things that you would like to discuss. We are here to help in any way that we can.

Elections can be daunting for many organizations, but they are also a good way to get our message out there to try and influence lasting change at the federal level.

As always – wherever there are challenges, there are also opportunities.

We are here to help you throughout the election. For any questions at any time, please contact:

Philippe Ozga

Director of Government Relations and Advocacy, Food Banks Canada

Phil@foodbankscanada.ca

613-863-5818

Isaac Smith

Policy and Government Relations Officer

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343-809-3394 ext.1132

Provincial Associations



Information package template

If you don't already have printed information about your organization, you can use this template to quickly inform election candidates about the work you do.

Information to include:

- Your organization's logo
- Your mission statement
- The services you offer
- Number of people helped by your food bank and/or other programs each month
- Number of children helped/percentage of people helped who are under age 18
- Number of seniors helped/percentage of people helped who are over age 65
- Number/percentage of people helped by your food bank who are working
- The types of food offered by your food bank
- Other important information relevant to your food bank and community (see Tool I)
- Printed copies of Food Banks Canada policy recommendations (see Tool E)
- Printed copies of the HungerCount 2018 report
- Your contact information
- Your most recent annual report

For any questions on how to best prepare this content, please contact Isaac Smith, Policy and Government Relations Officer, at isaac.smith@foodbankscanada.ca

The following are some steps you should take to increase the profile and success of your debate.

1 2 MONTHS BEFORE VOTING DAY (THE EARLIER THE BETTER)

- We recommend that you create an organizing committee within your organization, or in partnership with other community organizations, to prepare and organize the logistics of the debate long before the electoral period.

2 AS SOON AS THE DECISION TO HOST THE DEBATE IS MADE

- Confirm and book the location and date of the debate. The debate could take place at your location or wherever there is adequate space – for example a local hall, community centre, library, etc.
- Considering the unusual nature of the COVID pandemic, a debate can be hosted using an online platform like zoom.
- Choose a moderator and ensure that they are politically neutral. Local media personalities are often a good fit for this type of event.

3 3-4 WEEKS BEFORE NIGHT OF THE DEBATE

Invite all candidates to the debate:

- All candidates have a campaign manager – these people should be your first point of contact (unless you know candidates personally, in which case direct contact would be appropriate).
- Most candidates from the major parties will have a website during the election with a phone number and email where they can be reached. Elections Canada (www.elections.ca) will also have these details if you need them.

4 2-3 WEEKS BEFORE THE NIGHT OF THE DEBATE, AND CONTINUING UP TO THE DEBATE

- All efforts should be made to publicize the event so that there is good attendance from members of your community, including but not limited to your organization’s staff, Board and volunteers, and ideally people who have been assisted by your programs.
- You may have higher attendance if you are partnering with other organizations.
- All local media should be informed as soon as possible about the debate
 - You may want to consider sending a media advisory or press release to local media outlets (see Tool F for a template)
 - You may want to consider calling all local media outlets directly to suggest they run a story about the upcoming debate
- Members of the community can be notified through the local media, social media, press release and your contact lists.
- Other organizations in your community can be contacted to publicize and attend the debate, and to contribute to the open question period.

Reminder: As a registered charity, your organization cannot show any form of preference toward one candidate, one party or the platform of any party over another. Neutrality from all staff representing your organization in all aspects is incredibly important.

Utilizing this format for the debate will help you ensure that each candidate is treated equally and fairly. It will show everyone involved that the process is neutral and objective.

- Welcoming statement by the moderator explaining the format and ground rules of the debate, as well as the major focus of the debate (i.e. social issues). These should also be shared with the candidates and/or their campaign team in advance of the debate.
- The order in which the candidates make their opening statements and answer questions must be picked at random in an open display (i.e. picking names from a hat in front of the campaign managers of each participating candidate).
- Each candidate gets 4 minutes for their opening statements (around 12 to 20 minutes).
- After the opening statements, the moderator asks each candidate to take their turn to answer specific questions (see suggested questions below), which each candidate has 90 seconds to answer. (The order in which the candidates answer must also be random).
- The moderator will ask a series of around 5-6 questions (total of 45-50 minutes).
- After the prepared questions and answers, the moderator will open the floor for questions. These questions must be focused on relevant social issues as laid out in the moderator's opening statement, and the moderator will have the freedom to enforce this format.
- Each candidate must get a turn to answer each question that is posed from the floor.
- The allotted time for questions from the floor should be around 20-25 minutes.
- Each candidate should then be allowed to close the debate with a 2 minute closing statement, in reverse order of the candidates' opening statements (total of 6-10 min).
- Total length of the debate should be around 90 minutes.

All federal election candidates, their campaign managers and team members can be given the main debate questions ahead of time. This will provide the candidates and their parties some time to develop responses to the questions posed. The goal of the debate is to highlight each party's position on a given issue, and also to put the parties and the candidates in a position to think in depth about hunger and poverty.

To these ends, below are some suggested questions that we hope will stimulate thoughtful responses from the candidates and parties.

MODERATOR INTRODUCTION

- Welcome to everyone
- Quick overview of ground rules (see Tool C for more details)
- Welcome to the candidates
 - Candidates should be welcomed in order of their number of seats in the current House of Commons: Liberals, Conservatives, NDP, Green, other.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

1. In March 2019, food banks received more than 1 million visits from Canadians who needed help their help to make ends meet.

My first question is this – what will each of the federal parties do to significantly reduce the number of people needing help from food banks in Canada?
2. The high cost of housing is consistently referred to as the number one reason why people need a food bank to make ends meet. Meanwhile, housing prices have increased by almost 30% across the country between June of 2020 and June 2021.

While the current federal government has introduced a National Housing Strategy, it will take a long time for that strategy to have a direct impact on the cost of housing for people in our community. What will your party do to reduce the cost of housing in general, and more specifically – for low-income people looking for a safe, yet affordable place to live?

3. Less than 40% of unemployed Canadians are currently eligible to receive Employment Insurance – compared to more than 75% in the 1990s.

Additionally, in a 2021 parliamentary committee report, it was found that the current EI program “no longer reflects the realities of today’s labour market and is not well-positioned to respond to sudden labour market disruptions, such as those that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic”.

What will the candidates do to increase and restore the availability of well-paying, permanent jobs in our region, and in Canada?

4. What do you believe is the most pressing social issue in our region? What will you do, and what will your party do, to address this issue?

5. One of the most worrisome trends that food banks continue to see across the country is the increase in single adults needing help. This group of people, who are working age yet who live alone, have essentially become the ‘forgotten poor’ in our communities as very few social programs are there to support them.

What will your party do to better support low-income working-age adults who live alone so that they no longer need the support of their local food bank to make ends meet?

6. Indigenous and racialized individuals are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and represent a disproportionate number of food bank users.

We also know from more recent data that during the pandemic, Indigenous and racialized communities saw much higher rates of food insecurity than other groups. This is a problem that existed before the pandemic and has only increased over the last year.

What will you and your party do to promote equality both in and out of our community? How will your efforts work towards reducing poverty and food insecurity among Indigenous and racialized communities in Canada?

7. On average, Canadians with a disability who require social assistance are forced to live with an income that is over \$10,000 below the poverty line – leaving very little (if any) income for basic necessities like food.

While social assistance is a provincial responsibility, the wellbeing of Canadians is a concern for all governments. What will your party do to help those living with a disability live with dignity and with enough money to feed and house themselves?

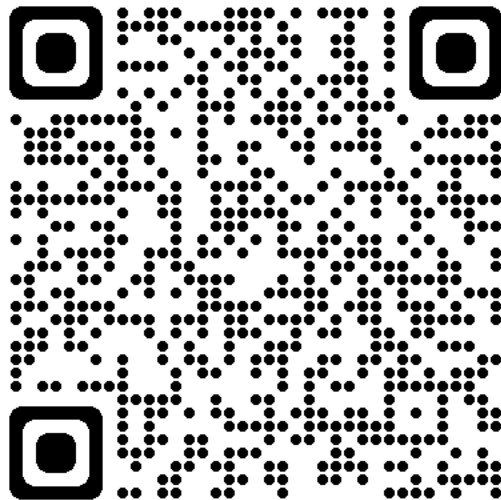
8. Mental health has become a growing concern across the country in the last year and a half, as Canadians have suffered new levels of stress, isolation, and loss.

What do you believe the pandemic has revealed about mental health in Canada today, and what do you hope to accomplish in improving mental health in the coming years?

Precise details of all 5 policy recommendations can be found in the separate 2021 Policy Recommendations document.

By now, you should have received a copy in your email. You may also access the document by selecting the below link or scanning the QR code on your smart phone.

<https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/2021-Policy-Recommendations.aspx>



Location, month, day, 2021

Media Advisory

Federal election candidates will discuss social issues in local debate

News media are invited to attend a federal election debate where [organization names] will host local election candidates to debate issues related to hunger and food bank use.

Date:

Time:

Where:

Who: Moderator
Candidate 1
Candidate 2
Candidate 3
Etc.

[description of the organization or organizations that are hosting the debate]

- 30 -

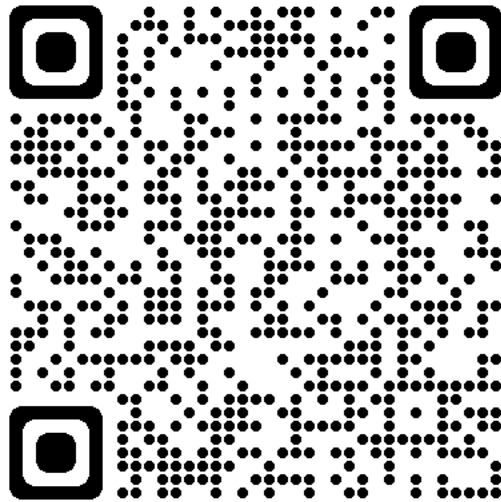
Contacts:

During the election, Food Banks Canada will be constantly monitoring and updating a Party Platform Monitor that will list what each party is promising regarding policies that can impact food banks and those who we support.

This will be an evolving document and more complete details will be shared as the platform goes live during the election.

It is our hope that as we work collectively to advocate for sound policies, all parties will feel compelled to provide information on how they plan on reducing poverty and ultimately reduce the need for food banks in the future.

<https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/2021-Election-Guide.aspx>



If you are unable to host a debate for the candidates in your riding, a great alternative is the development of a questionnaire. Once again, you can partner up with like-minded local organizations to help the spread and success of this strategy.

1 DEVELOP THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- Start this process as early as possible. Reach out to any partners who you will want contributing to the questionnaire.
- You can use the questions provided in the 'suggested debate questions' section as a starting point. It is good to also ask questions that can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'.
- Make sure your questions are narrow and specific – if it is too broad, the candidate may be able to avoid actually answering the question.
- Keep it brief. Be mindful of the candidate's busy schedule and try to keep it to 10 or fewer strong questions.

- Make sure you invite all the candidates in your riding to answer. The benefit of doing a questionnaire is that including candidates from outside the major parties does not distract from the core discussion, so do not be afraid to send it to everyone.
- Include information about who you are and what you do (see Tool A and E). Also provide a firm date for when you need the responses back and send follow-up messages to remind the candidates.

3 PUBLISH THE RESULTS

- Using a website or social media, post the finished results of the survey.

2 SEND THE QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE CANDIDATES

- All candidates have a campaign manager – these people should be your first point of contact (unless you know candidates personally, in which case direct contact would be appropriate).
- Most candidates from the major parties will have a website during the election with a phone number and email where they can be reached. Elections Canada (www.elections.ca) will also have these details if you need them.

Interactive Federal Riding Data Map

1. Click the link or scan the QR code on your smartphone.
2. Search your postal code or find your riding on the map.
3. Its that simple! Stats related to housing affordability, unemployment, child poverty, and more, all specific to your area.

<http://map.foodbankscanada.ca/>

