

HAVE YOUR SAY

A Guide to Policy Development



I - OVERVIEW

The Liberal Party of Canada's policy process links individuals, their community, their province, the country and the Party together. New ideas are gathered from Liberal members in riding associations and clubs and then shaped into policy resolutions that go on to form our Party's policy. This is the critical policy advice the membership provides to our governing members of caucus and forms the basis of the platform that we run on in an election.

Implementation
Biennial Convention
PTAs, Commissions, Caucus and NPEP
Riding association and club meetings
Resolutions
Policy Meetings
Party Members

PARTY MEMBERS

The policy process begins with the members who meet to share their opinions and beliefs on key issues. This can be done through a number of ways. Party members can meet at policy meetings held by riding associations or clubs. Also, technologies such as discussion boards and email are another way in which members can interact to discuss policy ideas.

Discussing policy is ongoing and critical to the Party's continued renewal. Riding associations and clubs are encouraged to make policy meetings a regular part of their activities.

POLICY MEETINGS

Policy meetings, organized by riding associations and clubs, should take whatever form works best. Basically, any activity that brings members together to discuss issues and ideas is a successful effort. This could be done through a town hall meeting, having a round table on a specific subject, using surveys through telephone or newsletters or having an on-line forum. The Party's extranet website features issue papers and backgrounders in the form of talking points. These resources are in place so that members can become informed about the topics to create solid policy.

Whatever format you choose, the key is to provoke friendly debate, and turn these opinions into ideas for action.

RESOLUTIONS

To move forward, ideas from policy meetings are written as policy resolutions. A resolution expresses support for, or suggests changes to existing practices; calls for specific action; or simply defines a point of principle.

Section IV of this booklet describes the format and mechanics of a resolution.

There are a number of ways in which associations submit resolutions. They may invite their members to submit them, or designate a Policy Chair who listens for policy ideas at association events and uses these views to create resolutions. Other associations and clubs have a policy subcommittee which meets specifically for discussion and drafts resolutions for approval by the executive or the membership.

It's important to remember that there is no single, set way for a club or association to generate its policymaking. The club or association can best determine what works best for them as an effective method.

RIDING ASSOCIATION AND CLUB MEETINGS

Once resolutions have been generated by an association or club, they must be endorsed by the local organization.

This can occur at an executive meeting, at a riding association or club general meeting, or possibly as an added part of a delegate selection meeting. At the meeting, members are asked to vote on accepting or rejecting each resolution, and also to rank the preferred resolutions in order of importance.

Provincial and Territorial Associations (PTAs), and the Liberal Party of Canada, may limit the number of resolutions that each club or association can move forward. Local clubs and associations should review the process with their provincial policy representative to determine local limits and timelines.

Provincial and Territorial Associations, Commissions, Caucus and NPEP

Resolutions passed by riding associations and clubs are sent to their respective Provincial and Territorial Associations to be voted on and prioritized.

In larger provinces, there may be an intermediate step, usually a regional meeting, between the riding association and the province's general policy meetings. At the regional meeting, a triage process of prioritization is carried out, before the selected resolutions of the regions are forwarded on to the provincial level.

For the 2011 Biennial Convention, each Provincial and Territorial Association may forward ten resolutions, one of which is designated as a priority resolution.

In addition, the Aboriginal Peoples' Commission, the National Women's Liberal Commission, the Young Liberals of Canada, the Senior Liberals' Commission, the National Liberal Caucus and the National Policy and Platform Committee (NPEP) can each send ten resolutions to the Biennial Convention. One of these can be designated as a priority resolution by each organization.

BIENNIAL CONVENTION

Each riding association or club is represented at the Biennial Convention by delegates which have been elected at a delegate selection meeting.

The ten resolutions that are forwarded by Provinces, Territories, and Commissions to the Biennial Convention are grouped by policy theme with others from across the country. These priority resolutions proceed directly to the plenary session for voting. The other resolutions can be discussed in theme-based workshops.

In the workshops, only one resolution is forwarded to the policy plenary session of the Biennial Convention. While there, they will be added to the priority resolutions that were originally forwarded for discussion and voting.

The resolutions adopted at the policy plenary become official Party policy.

IMPLEMENTATION

The policy process within the Liberal Party of Canada is an evolving process with a constant input from members across the country. An association or club executive should discuss policy on an ongoing basis in order to ensure that policy at the national level reflects grassroots opinion.

These resolutions can be submitted to the current MP, candidate, and provincial policy representative, to keep them informed about the priorities expressed by Liberal members in the ridings.

II - OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY PROCESS

The Liberal Party of Canada's policy process reflects the openness and grassroots nature of the Party as an institution that is accessible to like-minded individuals in Canadian cities and communities large and small.

Purposes

Ethically

Serves National Interest

Strategically

Serves Interests of Liberalism

Tactically

Serves Party's Interests

The objective of the policy process is to make the Liberal Party of Canada more likely to win office, and more effective in office, because of ongoing, innovative policy-making and constant renewal from people across Canada.

A democratic policy process serves the national interest by ensuring that our government's activities are influenced first by the ideas and preferences of Canadians who participate at the grassroots level.

The policy process is important - it gives a voice to each riding: unheld ridings can use it to have an impact on the activities of the Party and the caucus and, because of this, regional concerns are heard by our Party.

Tactically, the policy process makes our Party more likely to earn the confidence of Canadians to form the government. By tapping into the interests and expertise of individuals outside of government, the policy process keeps the Party's platform current and helps it to resonate with Canadians. In other words, the Party maintains its relevance by using the constant expression of new ideas from a broad range of grassroots Liberal members, riding-by-riding, and club-by-club to inform itself.

Strategically, grassroots participation ensures that Liberalism remains a living, growing philosophy.

III - LOCAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The policy-making efforts of a riding association or club are strengthened when they are focused through the delegation of specific responsibility to a Policy Chair, or coordinator.

The Policy Chair's first duty is to assemble a team or committee from a cross-section of Liberals in the community. It is also beneficial for a club or association to invite some other non-partisan members within the community to sit on their committee.

The committee should set goals and a work plan to focus its attention and efforts.

Besides organizing events and logistics for the policy process, the committee has an ongoing responsibility to:

- act as a liaison between its community and the Party;
- engage the local membership on issues of concern and represent their views to the Party;
- promote Liberal values and policies in the community;
- keep the locally elected MP informed about developments and trends in the community and enable him or her to continually serve the riding's local interests effectively; and
- monitor local issues to help a future Liberal candidate to be elected and to act as a critic of the current government.

In essence, community policy work is another form of ongoing election readiness: Liberals remain tuned in to the community's needs and interests, demonstrate their interest in policy outcomes that can positively affect the community, and are positioned to exploit the opponent's weaknesses or neglect of those issues.

There are numerous types of events that associations and clubs can use to have a policy discussion.

TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Town hall meetings are public meetings used by MPs to make themselves more accessible by providing a forum to hear their views. A Town Hall agenda can include speeches, debate and questions. Advertising should be done visibly within the community such as notices in schools, grocery stores, community agencies, churches and community newspapers.

POLICY FORUMS

General membership meetings are integral to the policy process. For such events to be successful, you need: a focused agenda; distribution of relevant information before the meeting; and a chair with a strong grasp of the rules of procedure.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Panel discussions require more detailed planning because they are more structured and formal, and often focus on one “hot” policy issue. Panelists can be political, non-partisan, or both. They should each bring specialized expertise on an issue or represent opposing viewpoints.

Each panel member should receive equal time (5-10 minutes) to present his or her position. With the assistance of one objective meeting chair, the audience should also be encouraged to ask questions and have ample time for discussion.

An advertised social period can be built into the program for the meeting so interested participants have time to meet one another or to informally shape the “report” of the event for policy resolutions.

DEBATES

Debates are similar to policy forums. It is important to invite knowledgeable and capable debaters, and a neutral chair is crucial to maintain order among people of differing views. As with all the other formats, it is useful to allow time for questions and answers, a social period, and some discussion by the club or association’s policy committee, to summarize the outcome and shape potential resolutions.

DISCUSSION GROUPS

If you are having difficulty organizing a single large event, a modest series of smaller events may be productive. Small groups of five to eight people, gathering regularly, can create discussion results and resolutions quite effectively. These groups should still have a strong leader to keep each discussion on track.

POLICY SOCIALS

Policy socials allow members to discuss issues in an informal setting. A knowledgeable specialist can be invited to give an informal talk to a group in someone’s home. Open discussion, questions and answers should follow. A chair should be named to facilitate the discussion.

Light refreshments can be served and further socializing encouraged after group discussion has ended.

RESEARCH AND CONSENSUS

Opinions

Policies

Ideas

No matter which kind of event your club or association creates, the objectives are the same: to hear the opinions of participants; stimulate thought and discussion; turn opinions to ideas; and to develop policy resolutions from those ideas.

To ensure that events generate ideas and not only opinions, take steps to ensure that participating members are informed for the discussions. This booklet and the Liberal Party of Canada Extranet include policy papers on current issues. In addition, you may wish to consult:

- your Liberal MP;
- other local representatives;
- local social service agencies;
- local advocacy groups;
- the local Chamber of Commerce;
- “think tanks” and research institutions;
- the Liberal Party of Canada’s website and Extranet;
- past policy resolutions;
- local university departments; and
- libraries.

The Liberal Party of Canada’s Extranet is a members’ only interactive space. A password is available to Riding and Club Presidents for use by members of the club or association, as appropriate.

LPC plans for the interactive website liberal.ca to be a tool that clubs and associations can use to compare their policy ideas to those in other ridings in their region, their province, and across the country, and to develop connections and create support for similar ideas.

Ultimately, the quality of resolutions produced by your association or club will determine the impact you are able to achieve.

IV - MECHANICS OF POLICY RESOLUTIONS

Resolutions are the end result of all efforts in the policy process.

A resolution is a statement, or set of statements, that clearly expresses a belief or a judgment on an issue of public policy. As well, it calls upon the Party to take a position or press for action.

Resolutions should be concise, clear, based on accurate facts, and written to achieve a specific purpose. They should contain no more than 250 words.

Resolutions have four distinct sections:

1 - TITLE

The title of a resolution should be concise, and quickly convey the subject of the resolution.

2 - PREAMBLE

The resolution must begin with a preamble.

A preamble begins with "Whereas". The preamble describes the situation, issue or context that gives rise to the resolution. As well, it lists facts necessary for the reader to understand the essence of the resolution. The preamble may state the reason the resolution is important. Finally, it offers arguments or attempts to anticipate counter-arguments, in order to command support.

Preambles must be limited to six per resolution. The combined number of preambles and operatives (see below) cannot exceed eight. A preamble can reference an internet link providing more information on research or rationale.

3 - DIRECTION (OPERATIVE)

The "Be it Resolved," (or "operative") section is the core of any resolution. It communicates the action that the authors want the Party to undertake. There may be several statements in the operative, depending on the complexity of the resolution.

The operative section should not repeat information already in the preamble.

There cannot be any numbers or letters used as subsections in this part of the resolution and operatives that follow the first one must be preceded by the phrase "Be it further resolved".

Operatives must be limited to a maximum of six per resolution. The combined number of preambles and operatives cannot exceed eight.

4 - AUTHORSHIP

The name of the resolution's sponsoring body must always be listed.

In drawing up a resolution, you should always remain focused on what you are trying to achieve. Is the goal of your resolution to:

- express support for a government action or stance;
- suggest alternatives to current practices; or
- ask the Party to press the government to achieve a specific goal.

If your intention is the last, you should bear in mind:

- what is the actual goal: what do you really want to achieve?
- what are the ways to get there?
- is the goal realistic?
- does it fall under the authority of the federal government?
- how would you measure achievement of the goals?

- what is the timeframe to reach the goal?
- do costs and benefits of the goal need to be assessed to strengthen support of the resolution?

A resolution is unlikely to be passed unless it calls for action or establishes a position that Liberals can understand and support. If a resolution is adopted, it will only have the desired effect if it is clear and recognizable.

Here are some common problems that weaken resolutions:

- The resolution lacks meaning, and it would not result in any measurable action.
- The resolution is too long, unwieldy, and hard to understand. It should be kept to 250 words
- Lack of factual accuracy.
- Inflammatory language.
- It does not fall under federal jurisdiction.

Finally, keep in mind that because time will pass between the drafting of the resolution and the Biennial Convention, resolutions should be current and relevant throughout the process.

PRESCRIPTIVE COMPONENTS for 2011 Biennial Convention Policy Process:

Length: Maximum 250 words

Font: Arial 14

Paper: letter size, 8.5" X 11"

Margins: 1 inch

Spacing: single space, double space between new paragraphs

All resolutions must have a Title, Preamble, Operative, and Authorship.

Title: All First Letters of any Main words in the Title must be Capitalized.
Example: Tax Credit for Text Books

Preamble: Must begin with WHEREAS.
Maximum number of Preambles to be used is six.
Preambles and Operatives combined cannot exceed eight.
Can include footnotes with website links for additional information.

Operative: First operative must begin with BE IT RESOLVED.
Further operatives must begin with BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED.
Maximum number of operatives is six.
Preambles and Operatives combined cannot exceed eight.

Authorship: The sponsoring body (association, club, commission, PTA, or committee) must be listed at the end of any resolution.

SAMPLE RESOLUTION:

(Title) Land Mines

(Preamble)

WHEREAS Canada has taken a leadership role in the elimination of landmines, with the recently signed Landmines Treaty;

WHEREAS these landmines have caused mass destruction, continue to kill and maim and destroy the quality of life for innocent people;

WHEREAS this treaty only deals with the manufacture of new land mines, the use of existing landmines and the destruction of already placed landmines;

WHEREAS the public has played a key role in furthering the principles of humanity as evidenced by the grassroots call for a total ban of antipersonnel mines;

(Operative)

BE IT RESOLVED that the Liberal Party of Canada supports the government of Canada's efforts to continue leading internationally to ensure early ratification, universalization and implementation of the treaty, also known as the "Ottawa II" process;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Liberal Party of Canada urges that the government of Canada broaden its outreach activities with schools, communities, NGO's and service organizations and work with these groups to establish a Canadian Mines Action Trust Fund to assist with the rehabilitation of persons affected by antipersonnel mines.

(Authorship)

National Policy and Platform Committee

V - AT THE PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL ASSOCIATION LEVEL

After approval at the local level, resolutions proceed to Provincial and Territorial Associations.

There are many resolutions competing to be one of the ten that proceed from each province, territory and Commission to the Biennial Convention. Some resolutions are popular and make their way into one of the ten spaces with little help from their authors. Usually, however, the association or club that creates a resolution will have to work creatively to persuade other Liberals to support that resolution instead of the many other good ideas that will be up for debate.

In order to maximize your chances of winning support, you should:

- ensure that riding association or club members turn out in force to support their resolutions;
- anticipate likely criticisms of your resolution and prepare counter-arguments;
- have strong public speakers move the resolution and respond to challenges from the floor;
- contact other associations or clubs before the provincial or territorial meeting, building support for your resolution;

- share the sponsorship of resolutions with other associations or clubs; and
- distribute flyers at the provincial or territorial meeting or in advance, by mail.

Develop support for your resolution through the liberal.ca website and electronic contact with your own networks of Liberal acquaintances.

Even the best resolutions need to be promoted effectively to be noticed and to advance.

The objective of the policy process is not only to establish the Party's policies, but also to stimulate debate and reflection among Party members. If you want your resolution to be passed, you must roll up your sleeves, negotiate, lobby, and sell it to the larger body of Liberal members.

VI - AT THE BIENNIAL CONVENTION

The Biennial Convention is the highest authority of the Party. It is attended by delegates elected by every riding association and club, a number of ex-officio delegates, members of the Parliamentary and Senate Liberal caucus, and observers. It is also watched closely by national media.

Priority resolutions coming from the provinces, territories, Commissions, Caucus, and the National Policy and Platform Committee proceed directly to the Convention's Policy Plenary session. All other resolutions are voted on in workshops which could be either online or at the Convention.

Because of the large number of resolutions coming in to the workshops from across the country, the time for debate is limited. Delegates should read through the resolutions before attending a policy workshop.

Each workshop chooses one priority resolution to send to the policy plenary.

All resolutions passed at the Policy Plenary by delegates from across the country become official Party policy.

VII - AFTER THE CONVENTION

The Biennial Convention resolutions help shape the Party's next election platform.

The policies that come up from the grassroots and are selected at the national convention are strong ideas that have resonated with other Liberals across Canada who participated in the process as well as the delegates who attended the Biennial Convention.

The next step for members is to campaign for the Liberal Party in support of those ideas in an upcoming election campaign, and see that the Party has the opportunity to transform its written policies into action by winning the right to form government.

In many ways, though, the end of the Convention is a beginning of the next policy process.

After the Convention

Individual

Event

Implement

Resolutions

Policy development is something that can be done on an ongoing basis by any individual member of the Liberal Party of Canada willing to participate actively in a riding association or club.

The Liberal Party of Canada's website will remain active as an interactive tool for members to discuss and refine policy ideas. Meanwhile, resolutions that were "left behind" from the provincial and Biennial Convention processes are still useful tools to express regional concerns to localized portions of the caucus or individual MPs.

Outside of the formal Biennial policy cycle, associations and clubs should continue organizing policy meetings and communicating the results to their MPs. Policy development is an ongoing core function of every association and club and a dynamic factor that contributes to our Party's sustained success.

The Liberal Party is always stronger because of the ongoing use of the wealth of intellectual and creative abilities of the individual members of our associations and clubs, and that wealth can be harnessed in each association and club through a permanent and active policy committee.