

The Government of Canada oversees matters of national concern such as Defense and Foreign Relations (we may want to civically engage with such ministers/ministries as the ones for Employment and Social Development Canada and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada). The Government of Ontario oversees matters such as Policing and Labour (we may want to civically engage with such ministers/ministries as the ones for Community and Social Services and Health and Long-Term Care).

Toronto's City Council is elected to manage municipal finances, develop and maintain vital infrastructure (roads, bridges, parks, etc.), and run other local public services such as mass transit, garbage collection, water and sewage processing, and policing. Because the Ontario Municipal Elections Act does not permit the formation of parties to field candidates in municipal elections, any councilor may be appointed to run key boards and commissions.



Photo: Robert Snache

PROJECT AND ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This pamphlet is one of a series of four produced by the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) through a larger initiative titled the Aboriginal Civic Literacy Initiative. The project aims to increase Aboriginal community members' ability and desire to pursue effective civic engagement with all levels of government, in ways that will result in increased governmental attention and resources for urban Aboriginal community needs and aspirations. **Project funding provided by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) through its Aboriginal Urban Strategy is gratefully acknowledged.**

The Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council is a not-for-profit policy and research organization that addresses social determinants to improve and enhance the social, economic and cultural base of Aboriginal peoples in the City of Toronto (for more information, please visit www.tassc.ca on-line or contact a representative of the organization by phone at 647-748-6100 or by e-mail at info@tassc.ca).

Photo: W. Lloyd MacKenzie

ABORIGINAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: OUR GOVERNMENT BRIEFLY EXPLAINED

Pamphlet 2 in a Series of 4
Aboriginal Civic Literacy Pamphlets



OVERVIEW OF GOVERNMENT ENTITIES AND PERSONNEL

A big part of Civic Engagement is influencing or otherwise dealing with government, so it's important to have at least a basic understanding of it. There are 3 levels of non-Aboriginal government: the Canada-wide federal government, the Ontario-wide provincial government, and the city-wide municipal government. Our own self-governance is important, too, so we should start to think about and discuss how the Aboriginal community can govern itself in the City of Toronto.

The way things work in the mainstream system is that politicians are elected by the people to represent their interests in government. Once elected, they consider—and criticize or implement—proposed laws and government actions. They also make other high-level decisions with the assistance of government workers (who also help them to enforce laws and policies, and generally run day-to-day government operations and public services for them).

When citizens, corporations, or government officials disagree with government decisions, claims, or actions they can sometimes appeal to courts of law, administrative tribunals (e.g. human rights commissions), and other 'watch-dog' agencies which exist to help people. (The latter two types of bodies especially tend to be on the side of the 'little guy', by the way, and lawyers do most of the work for us, of course, in courts of law).

GOVERNMENT CONDUITS FOR OUR POLITICAL SUCCESS

The citizens of Toronto elect 89 politicians to represent their interests in government, including:

- 22 federal Members of Parliament (MPs) out of 317 MPs who sit in the House of Commons in Ottawa;
- 22 Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) out of 107 MPPs who sit in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in Toronto; and
- 1 Mayor and 44 Councillors who make up the City of Toronto's governing municipal body, the City Council.

We must persuade them (through voting and lobbying, as well as other less direct forms of influence and advocacy) to enact laws and authorize policies, funds, and services that will address Aboriginal community needs. It would be useful to engage with the Prime Minister of Canada, Premier of Ontario, and other federal and provincial ministers, political party leaders, and senior bureaucrats, too.

LEVEL-SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

At the federal and provincial levels of government, politicians usually belong to political parties and make decisions that are supported by party policy. The three main political parties are the Liberals, New Democrats, and Conservatives (please see the [Aboriginal Civic Literacy Resources Booklet](#) for further information). Furthermore, other smaller parties (such as the Green Party, for example) also exist, and candidates may even run independently if they wish. They need to take a more active hand in shaping the world in which they'll be spending the rest of their lives.