

OTHER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT (AND READ) BEYOND VOTING

Although this pamphlet focuses mostly on voting considerations for civic engagement, we must remember that it is much more than this alone. Political awareness and understanding of government matter, too, as well as deciding what our community priorities are and how to achieve them (through activism and volunteerism).

There are three other Aboriginal Civic Literacy pamphlets in this series of four that discuss these things in more detail: [Our Government Briefly Explained](#), [Our Motivations and Issues](#), and [Our Options for Action](#). Please read them, too; you'll be glad you did. In addition to this, we have also written an [Aboriginal Civic Literacy Resources Booklet](#) and produced an [Aboriginal Civic Literacy Video](#) with still more useful information.

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).

ABORIGINAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: OUR NUMBERS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Pamphlet 1 in a Series of 4
Aboriginal Civic Literacy Pamphlets



Photo: Robert Snache

WHAT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO US

Civic Engagement is important to the Aboriginal community. More of us must acquire the will, gain the knowledge, and take the necessary steps to become civically involved in our society. This means voting in elections, becoming more politically active, and involving ourselves with charitable, volunteer, and other community service organizations to address important community matters such as health and education.

If we do these things we can make the world a better place in which to live, and ensure that we enjoy the dignity and respect we deserve. Our fate is in our own hands—all we have to do is seize the opportunity.

ALL OF OUR VOTES MATTER—ESPECIALLY OUR YOUTHS'

61% of all Canadian citizens of potential voting age voted in the 2011 federal election, but only 39% of youth aged 18 to 24 voted. The trend of low youth voter-ship hurts the Aboriginal community especially hard at the polls, as nearly 50% of us are under the age of 25.

Clearly, our youth must vote in greater numbers; all the more so because the Aboriginal population is young and growing, which means that their influence will continue to grow—if they seize the opportunity. The community needs their fresh perspectives and positive energy, and they need to take a more active hand in shaping the world in which they'll be spending the rest of their lives.

HOW AND WHY THE ABORIGINAL VOTE NUMERICALLY MATTERS

In terms of the numbers game: about 70,000 Aboriginal people live in Toronto; the Aboriginal population is growing about 4x faster than the non-Aboriginal population; and there are more than 301,425 persons of Native ancestry living in Ontario (with 63% of the province's First Nations population living off-reserve). This means that there are a lot of potential votes that could be used to ensure better political representation of Aboriginal community needs and aspirations at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels of government.

However, some of our people don't vote because they believe that voting in non-Aboriginal elections hurts our rights and autonomy, or that their votes simply don't matter. This needs to change: the truth of the matter is that we can't get what we want and make things better if we don't vote, because the only sure way of getting non-Aboriginal government to listen is to elect politicians who we are sure will listen to us.



Photo: Robert Snache