

**ONTARIO NEW
DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

2022 Campaign Review Committee

Report to Provincial Council, March 2023



Ontario New Democratic Party 2022 Campaign Review Committee Report to Provincial Council

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Our Report

“We’re going to have to start to do things differently if we want a different result.”

The 2022 campaign was to take us to government. It was the best financed and most resourced campaign ever put in the field by the ONDP. The leader and campaign team were the same people who had come so close to forming government in 2018. We even had the same discredited Progressive Conservative leader to run against.

This time candidates would be better vetted to prevent the distractions of the past campaign. We would have as much or more than the other parties to spend during the campaign period. The platform would be carefully developed and costed. We had maintained an active opinion research program and produced dozens of ads for the pre-election and election period. We were ready to win and to govern.

And yet, when the votes were counted, we dropped to 31 seats from 40 and lost 813,000 votes, or 42 per cent from our vote in 2018—more than the drop for any other party. Although we had retained our position as the official opposition and the only party other than the government recognized at Queen’s Park, some felt this had as much to do with a weak Liberal campaign as it did with our actions.

For four years everything had been focused on building a strong central campaign that would punch through, seize the public’s attention and elect Andrea Horwath as premier. Anything less was sure to be a disappointment for New Democrats.

With the disappointment came a search for reasons. Many were offered. The waves of COVID following March 2020 had given Doug Ford a bully pulpit and

made it difficult or impossible for Andrea to stay in the news. The federal elections of 2019 and 2021 twice interrupted preparations for our provincial campaign. First-term governments, especially during an emergency like COVID, are almost impossible to defeat. By June of 2022 people were exhausted with COVID restrictions and bad news and just wanted to tune out and enjoy the summer. No doubt there's some truth to these suggestions.

But at a deeper level our campaign simply failed to connect with voters or engage their interest. Many of our voters stayed home. The remarkable 13-per-cent drop in turnout across the province came mostly at our expense. Name recognition, strong local campaigns and a weak Liberal provincial campaign saved most of the NDP incumbents, but five of our MPPs standing for re-election lost, and only three new MPPs were added to the caucus.

It was not enough just to be against Doug Ford. Our focus on strategic voting was a call for change without providing compelling reasons for making that change. In a province with a three-party system, it is not enough to say no to the other two parties; we must provide reasons to say yes to us.

Following the election, the party executive set up the Campaign Review Committee 2022 to conduct a comprehensive review of the campaign and to make recommendations for the next provincial election.

Our research, surveys and interviews quickly showed us that many parts of the campaign went well – online training for volunteers and staff, riding fundraising, campaign support for developing ridings, the platform, research, and much of the tour are examples of positive elements pointed out to us. Although our attention was more often drawn to problems than to success stories, we'll try to acknowledge what went right and should be retained for 2026.

It's important to recognize that this report is the result of more than 400 conversations that have taken place over the past six months. We have talked with senior party staff, members of the executive and council, successful and unsuccessful candidates, riding activists, volunteers, organizers, labour leaders, communications and opinion research professionals, pundits, campaign managers and re-elected, retiring and defeated MPPs. We

promised them all confidentiality and assured them we would, without credit, use any good quotes they gave us.

Your questions and observations often led us to unexpected findings and forced us to review minutes, reports and data. This led to more questions. We made sure to read all the written reports and all the member surveys. Our committee has met more than 40 times since August.

This has been a massive project for a few busy volunteers, but it has been guided by the insights and experiences of hundreds of dedicated New Democrats.

You'll find some of our recommendations are simple, even if they may be hard to implement: use the certainty of the fixed election date to develop detailed four-year plans; make sure that everyone knows what they're responsible for and look out for silos; start everything sooner.

But to really do things differently to get a different and better result we need to make building capacity in the party and in our members the priority.

We found the 2022 campaign to have been built from the centre out – tightly focused on the leader, the campaign period and the central campaign. If the central campaign went well, it would pull everyone else along and we would elect enough MPPs to form a government. To make that work the things that really mattered in the campaign would be the leader, paid advertising and the tour.

This approach has been used many times by many parties over the past 20 years. Sometimes it works. But we don't think it works for us in Ontario. For us, success will come from working with our members and allies to build a strong party.

We offer in our report a different model for the ONDP in the coming years.

Our recommendations are about building the party from the ground up, rather than a government from the leader out. They are about taking the next four years to build a strong, representative party that can work with the leader and caucus.

In the course of collecting data about the election, we have assembled an archive for the group planning the next campaign. It includes minutes of meetings, TV, radio and social media ads, leaflets, plans, charts and whatever else we found. We hope it will be useful.

What happens next?

That's up to the ONDP executive and council.

We hope this report starts a debate about the roles of modern political parties, what we owe our members and activists, how we campaign, and how to engage an increasingly distant and skeptical electorate. We know not everyone will agree with our recommendations. Differences of opinion are expressions of healthy internal life, not obstacles to overcome.

We believe this report is a road map rather than a blueprint. We have pointed to what we believe are the best destinations and have suggested a way to get there. But it will be up to you to decide what to adopt, what to amend and how to adapt as you move forward over the next four years.

We will be presenting to executive and council a “how-to list” of specific checkpoints that would help implement our recommendations.

Everyone we spoke to wants the party to grow. We know the leader and the MPPs will do their jobs. Starting now, we all need to move forward to build our party from the ground up. We think this report points to a way to do that and then to elect an NDP government in 2026.

We express our gratitude to all of you who took the time to provide your thoughtful insights, and invite all New Democrats to continue to add your voice, your knowledge, your skill, and your energy to this future.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Making decisions

The June 2022 election was probably the largest campaign ever developed and delivered by the ONDP. It was developed through the many waves of COVID – the most pressing public health emergency of our times. And it took place in the largest and arguably most politically complex jurisdiction in Canada outside of a national campaign.

But the results of the campaign fell short of its goal of forming government and the expectations of activists.

Many have suggested it was hard to know where decisions were being made and the reasons for those decisions. Some felt that the system was closed to critical feedback and too few people were involved. There was confusion about the role of the executive and other committees in the management of the party's on-going business and the conducting of a campaign. It appeared that party oversight of the campaign had been insufficient.

Building capacity from the ground up will mean building the party's own internal structures to ensure transparent and accountable decision-making.

We are recommending the establishment of an active Election Planning Committee this year. It is to have well-defined positions, procedures and responsibilities and a close reporting relationship with the executive. We are also recommending changes in the procedures within the executive to ensure more effective and transparent decision-making. While recognizing the need for hybrid meetings, we are encouraging the return to in-person meetings for the executive and other party events.

Starting now, building for the long term

Over the years a predictable pattern has developed of ramped-up activity immediately prior to and during the campaign period. Staff are hired, ridings organized, candidates nominated, and central and local campaigns get into gear. Our research suggested that most of the interaction with local volunteers was exclusively focused on the 2022 election — fundraising, candidate search, canvassing, pre-election preparations. While all of these are necessary for a successful election, there were few similar programs to help ridings between elections.

If we expect the central campaign to be the only deciding factor in campaigns, if the leader, advertising and tour are all that matters, this system

may work. But if we're trying to build a strong political party, we need time to do the work.

We heard from many that it was impossible to build capable, representative and effective ridings in a few months before the election. They argued that short-term planning and an exclusive focus on elections meant that riding development was never a priority and resources were not available for the patient talent-spotting, recruitment and training required.

We are recommending that building strong riding associations be the priority of organizational staff through to the fall of 2024 and, after that, be an integral part of the run-up to the 2026 campaign. This would include hiring field staff as soon as possible, recruiting and training volunteers, supporting riding-level projects, and committing to long-term funding in the party's annual budget.

Reaching out, welcoming in

Some told us that the time to have conversations was between elections, when passions were lower and minds more open. Others said the only way to grow was to look outwards and extend a hand.

We heard that New Democrats were excited about the opportunity to build new political coalitions with our traditional allies in unions and extend our networks with groups seeking equity and social justice across the province. They felt the Conservative policies of privatization, starving essential public services and favouring their friends were energizing a new generation of labour and community activists who share New Democrat values.

We are recommending initiatives to renew our relationship with union members by creating closer links to discuss shared concerns, communications that talk about the issues that matter to working people, and outreach by members and MPPs to local union organizations.

The party has changed to better reflect the changing faces of Ontario, and we need to continue to reach out to communities that have not previously supported us. Over the past four years the caucus has worked hard to engage with ethno-cultural communities, and we encourage them to continue their efforts. We know we need to do more to be inclusive and to reject any form of racism or discrimination. We know we need to be ready to represent all Ontarians.

We are recommending a community engagement organizer be hired this year to help ridings build relationships with ethno-racial communities. This

organizer is to work with the directors of organization and communications to develop strategies for the campaign.

Training for the future

The online training offered by the party in the run-up to the 2022 campaign was considered by many to have been one of its most successful programs. It was seen as a tangible service provided by the party to build election capacity in the ridings, especially at a time when COVID had so severely restricted in-person training.

We are recommending that the online program be updated, include sections on riding development as well as campaign skills, and be made available on a regular schedule.

Although the online training was highly regarded, we identified a failure to do long-term staff and volunteer development. Because of the focus on elections and the absence of permanent field staff, the slow work of identifying potential campaign staff, training and mentoring has not been done recently. We found that although there are many young people eager to learn, we're facing a human resource deficit as many of our most experienced campaigners retire or move into other work.

We are recommending that staff and campaign volunteer development be made a priority. This should include discussions with central and riding campaign staff and interested volunteers to review their goals and experience and explore paths for future training and placements.

Giving volunteers the tools they need for success

Our volunteers are our greatest asset. Across the province they keep ridings going, find candidates, raise money, file financial returns, get involved in their local communities, build the party, and work in local, provincial and federal campaigns.

Everyone we spoke to appreciated the efforts made by staff to help when problems came up. But, too often we heard that some volunteers felt their efforts were not appreciated, or that their problems and responsibilities were the last things considered when decisions were made. Sometimes simple problems became complex because it wasn't clear who to call. With too few permanent field staff to keep in touch, share information and help with riding activities, frustrations grew and volunteers became disengaged. Some felt

they were thought to be problems rather than partners. We believe some of these problems will be addressed by our recommendations to make building riding associations a priority, committing to community engagement in the long term and increasing training.

We are recommending that the party find ways to provide volunteers with the tools they need for success in a constantly changing environment. This could include sharing more information, encouraging cooperation on projects with neighbouring ridings, updating software and consulting on changes to the data systems. Additionally, we are recommending a comprehensive review of the party's financial systems be undertaken to streamline and modernize its operations so that CFOs might more efficiently, and easily, continue to meet their reporting obligations.

Searching for and nominating candidates

We found the party recruited and nominated a slate of candidates that closely mirrored the profile of modern Ontario. Careful candidate vetting and direct riding-level support for official nominations meant that all 124 candidates were nominated on time and stayed on the ballot.

However, we also found the system was a source of frustration and confusion to many potential candidates and activists. To many it was not clear who was making decisions, how they were being made and the timelines for a final decision. It was felt that many candidates were nominated too late to campaign effectively.

We are recommending a major overhaul of the candidate search and nomination processes. We encourage the continued recruitment and subsequent sustained support of equity-deserving candidates, as well as careful vetting. We are recommending guidelines that will more clearly define who is responsible, establish deadlines for all parties involved, require better internal communications and provide greater transparency.

Improving communications

One of the most frequent concerns we heard was that almost all communications from the ONDP were asking for a donation rather than discussing current events, statements by the leader or MPPs or party policy. We need to better communicate with our members and activists. We need to look for opportunities to share information and engage in conversations with key audiences.

We are recommending that the party begin this conversation by designing a monthly newsletter to members and supporters. It should also develop a parallel program for communicating through social media to specific audiences.

We also heard of the need for consistent, timely communications support for campaigns and candidates. Too often communications were late, inappropriate or inaccessible.

We are recommending that the party develop a comprehensive communications program to support ridings in the pre-election period and campaigns. This should include training on how to use traditional and social media platforms, manuals, checklists, technical support, and layout or production of campaign materials. This program must aim to increase the availability of translated materials and support communications in non-English, French, and ethno-cultural media markets.

Finally, the challenge of ensuring consistent and effective communications in an Ontario campaign was emphasized in a number of interviews. Ideally, riding leaflets, social media posts, the presentation of the platform, statements by the leader and other officials, and ads should all reinforce each other and offer voters a vision of the priorities and principles of the party and its campaign.

We are recommending that the director of communications be responsible for setting up a plan for coordinating the delivery of campaign messages.

Reviewing how we campaign

In addition to speaking with members and activists in the field, we spent a great deal of time listening to the people who had worked at the centre in organization, data management, leader's tour, opinion research and communications. All of them had worked hard to produce a winning campaign, and all were generous in their advice.

For the most part, even under the most trying of conditions, like touring during COVID, most systems operated well during the campaign. Not perfectly, but well.

However, we believe this is the time to make sure the systems work better – both on their own and as part of the many moving pieces of an integrated campaign. We think it is important to do this now because we are living through radical changes in technology, media, communications, and the ways in which citizens are getting their information. With a new leader, new

team, and three years to do the analysis and implementation, we think we have the time to get it right.

Building on the experience and expertise the party already has, we are recommending analysing:

- how we should be doing opinion research and making the best use of the findings
- best practices for an effective leader’s tour in today’s media and communications market
- the development, maintenance and most effective use of data systems and tools in modern campaigns
- the better integration of central and local communications.

Planning better

No matter where we looked, we were almost certain to hear someone suggest we should have started sooner – candidate search, leaflets, assigning campaign staff, research, etc. We had thought at one time to simply report our findings as “Start Everything Sooner.”

Many argued the fixed-date election was a mixed blessing. Although it provided certainty of when the next election would happen, which should have provided an opportunity to plan and build over at least a four-year cycle, it also meant decisions could be deferred as more immediate and pressing problems captured the attention of volunteers and staff. Others suggested the scale and complexity of an Ontario election made detailed planning impractical. Almost everyone acknowledged that something is always late in any campaign.

However, we need written plans not only to ensure that programs are effective and timely, but to make sure they are transparent to other staff and volunteers. This will be even more important if we undertake long-term capacity building within the party and with our activists.

We are recommending that the executive strike a committee to be informed by this report and develop a strategic plan for the next four years.

We are also recommending it become a standard operating practice to require all departments to develop written plans for both party development and campaign-related activities.

Managing better

We were reminded in our research and interviews how large, complex and challenging a provincial campaign in Ontario can be, and the demands that are made on key staff and volunteers. All of this is exacerbated in a 28-day campaign with hundreds of staff, volunteers, candidates, and activists stepping up to fill new roles or accept new responsibilities.

However, we found that sometimes people were confused about their jobs, about who was responsible for a project or product, about how what they were doing related to the rest of the team's efforts. We heard that we lost some opportunities and some time. Some systems broke down because they hadn't been fully tested.

We are recommending that teams and systems be thoroughly tested prior to the election whenever possible. Any problems or gaps in procedures, systems or personnel should be addressed before the campaign starts.

We know our central recommendation of investing in capacity building in the party and the activist base complicates an already complex system. The campaign team and the Election Planning Committee will have to develop and manage a leader's tour, paid advertising, research, platform, candidate search, and opinion research just as they did in 2022. But, if our recommendations are accepted, they will also be involved in a three-year project to attract more members, expand community networks, connect with stakeholders, and create more effective systems. They need to start soon.

We are recommending that a director of organization be hired as soon as possible, and that a campaign director be hired by the end of the year. No later than spring 2024 a director of communications should be hired to support party communications and begin planning for the campaign.

Building to win

Our shared objective should be to win the next provincial election, and we hope that our recommendations will be a map for the ONDP over the next three years. Our winning government would have consequences for the province—better funded public services, greater opportunity, a more equitable economy and a commitment to real environmental sustainability. Winning government is not the end in itself; it is the means to improving the lives of Ontarians.

We want to build capacity, simplify planning and make ridings campaigns more successful.

We are recommending that the provincial convention be scheduled for the fall of 2025 to ensure more predictable planning for the run-up to the election.

The public subsidy for provincial political parties and registered riding associations is scheduled to end on December 31, 2024. This will have a significant effect on the annual cash-flow of all parties for both annual operations and election expenditures. Now is the time to build on the successful fundraising programs developed over the past four years.

We are recommending that fundraising staff be hired and a four-year plan be developed as soon as possible to increase direct donations to the central party and to work with riding fundraisers.

We are also recommending assured funding for core programs until 2027.

We have previously suggested that building active riding associations and developing well-informed, well-trained volunteers be priorities in the coming year. As we approach the election in 2026, local riding associations must turn their attention to getting ready for their riding campaigns.

To help these campaigns we are recommending:

- earlier nomination of candidates whenever possible
- earlier assignment of campaign staff
- clearer lines of communications to support local campaigns
- more user-friendly tools for data collection and use
- support from community engagement
- special support for developing ridings.

Thank you for your time and your ideas.

Thank you to everyone who talked with us or sent a report or survey answer. You generated the ideas for our recommendations.

We know we are asking a lot of party members, leaders, and staff. But we all want to live in an Ontario that provides opportunities to ordinary people, looks after our environment, and treats everyone fairly and equitably.

In solidarity,

The 2022 Campaign Review Committee

Co-Chairs: Janelle Brady, Dennis Young

Members: Lynn Dee Eason, Rosemarie Bahr

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About the Campaign Review Committee

The executive set up this committee just after the 2022 election to do a comprehensive review of the campaign and submit its report to the provincial council. The executive motion asked that the review “assess strengths and weaknesses and include analysis of the result and solution-based, actionable recommendations to prepare for the next election campaign.”

The review was to inform a strategic plan for the future. The committee members hope that it does.

Janelle Brady, co-chair and president of the ONDP, is an anti-racist educator, activist-researcher, and community organizer. She is also an assistant professor of Black Studies in the School of Early Childhood Studies at Toronto Metropolitan University. She’s been a riding CFO and played numerous roles on campaigns including canvasser, VCO, fundraiser, GOTV organizer and campaign manager. She joined the party’s executive in 2014 as a co-chair of the Ethno-Racial Equity Committee and was later elected as vice-president in 2016 before her successful campaign as party president.

Dennis Young, co-chair, first canvassed in the 1968 campaign in Hamilton. He’s also been a riding activist, a staff field organizer, federal secretary, and acting secretary in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Ontario. He’s managed national, provincial, territorial and riding campaigns across Canada. He’s been chief of staff to four leaders at Queen’s Park and Parliament Hill and senior adviser on three leaders’ tours. He’s also been involved in polling, communications, financial management, and planning for campaigns and for the party between elections.

Lynn Dee Eason, is president of Algoma-Manitoulin ONDP and co-chairs the party’s Northern Caucus. Previously, she co-chaired the Women’s Committee where she increased social media outreach substantially. In campaigns she’s been a door knocker, sign person, manual cold caller, and Call-Hub user as well as a manager. She taught software and communications at Sault College and is an active OPSEU/SEFPO member where she is now on staff temporarily after coordinating a successful campaign to elect a new president.

Rosemarie Bahr has worked in 30 provincial, federal and by-elections from coast to coast. She worked full-time for six years for the Ontario NDP and another six for the Ontario caucus. She’s directed central communications, taught staff and volunteers, managed riding campaigns, run E-days, worked on leaders’ tours, and written leaflets and policy. She’s also been editor of the Canadian Association of Labour Media and worked for many unions, writing newsletters, stories and even constitutions.