



Your Ideas
Your City
Our Future

Submission to Local Government Elections Task Force

May 26, 2010

Introduction

The Think City Society has been an advocate of local democratic reform since 2003 and appreciates the opportunity to make this additional submission to the local government elections task force.

In Think City's April 15 submission to the task force, our survey of 3,689 British Columbians showed overwhelming public support for campaign finance reforms. Moreover, the real or perceived influence of large donors on local elections and the day-to-day work of elected councils and municipal boards in the 2008 municipal election has galvanized thousands of citizens to ask this task force to reform how local elections are financed.

As a follow-up to this submission, Think City surveyed 1,025 British Columbians online from May 11 to 21 to seek public feedback on specific donor contribution limits, public funding options and campaign spending caps. The balance of this submission will outline the key recommendations that are supported by the opinions of hundreds of British Columbians who want the provincial government to limit the perceived or real influence of election campaign financing on local council decisions.



A. Contribution Limits

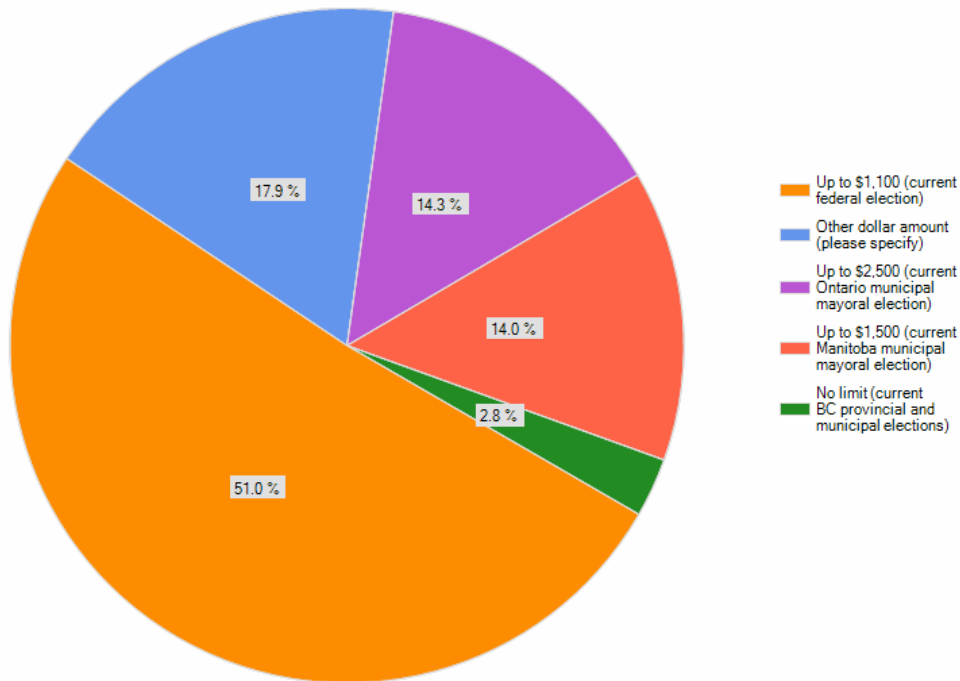
Think City believes donor contribution limits would force candidates to broaden their support base and reduce the influence of large contributors. Currently there are no contribution limits for donors to candidates and/or civic parties at the municipal level in British Columbia.

Federally, parties and their candidates can receive up to \$1,100 from candidates. Unions and corporations are not allowed to make federal political donations. In BC, there are no limits on contributions to provincial parties and their candidates.

Other major Canadian cities limit donations to mayoral campaigns in election years with limits ranging from \$1,500 to \$2,500. Toronto has banned all union and corporate donations for the 2010 municipal election.

Think City asked survey participants what they felt was an appropriate contribution limit per donor per candidate or party for BC's municipal elections. Nearly 80 per cent want donor contributions capped at between \$1,100 and \$2,500 annually. **Based on the level of support and the public interest in ensuring that the influence of large campaign contributors is minimized, Think City supports limiting individual or organizational contributions to up to \$2,500 per year.**

Table 1 - Contribution Limits: What is an appropriate contribution limit per donor per candidate/party?



B. Public Funding

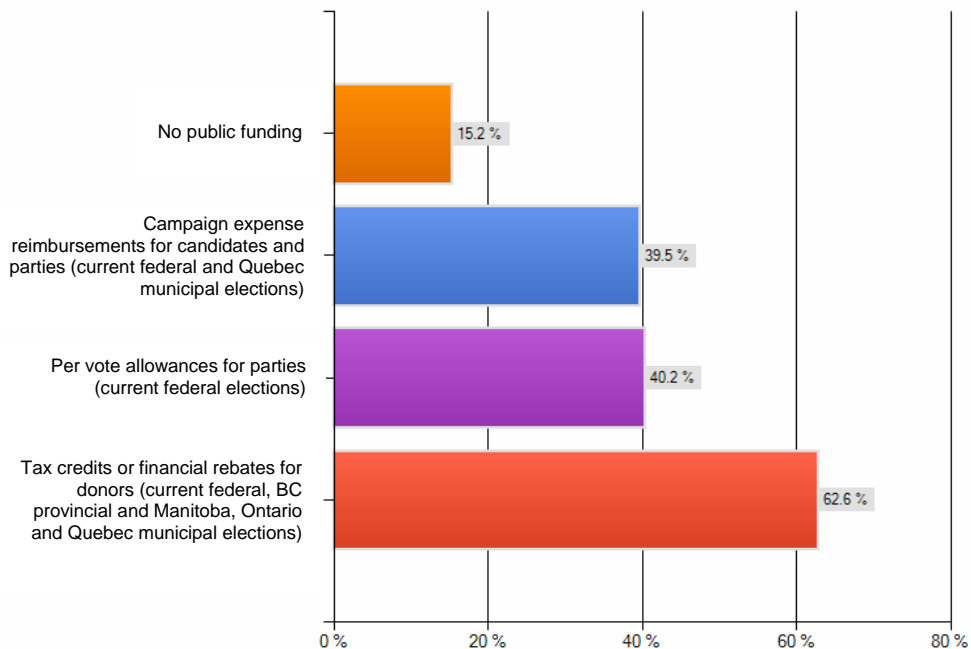
Think City believes that public funding would make it easier for candidates and/or parties to run in local elections. Currently there is no public funding for BC's local elections.

Federally, parties and their candidates benefit from three types of public financing: federal tax credits for donors up to \$592, a \$1.75 per vote annual allowance, and reimbursement of up to 60 per cent of campaign expenses provided candidates receive at least 10 per cent of the vote. In BC, donors to provincial parties and their candidates receive a provincial income tax credit of up to \$500.

Public financing at the local level exists in Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. In Winnipeg and Toronto, campaign donors receive a rebate of up to \$1,000. In Quebec, donors receive a provincial tax credit of up to \$105, while parties and candidates are reimbursed 50 per cent of their campaign expenses provided they receive at least 15 per cent of the vote.

Think City asked survey participants to identify which public funding options they supported. Nearly 63 per cent support tax credits or donor rebates. Expense reimbursements and per vote allowances both had only 40 per cent support. **Based on the majority support and the public interest in ensuring candidates and parties have additional financial support to access voters more readily, Think City supports the introduction of tax credits or donor rebates for BC's local elections.**

Table 2 - Public Funding: What public funding options for candidates/parties do you support?



C. Spending Limits

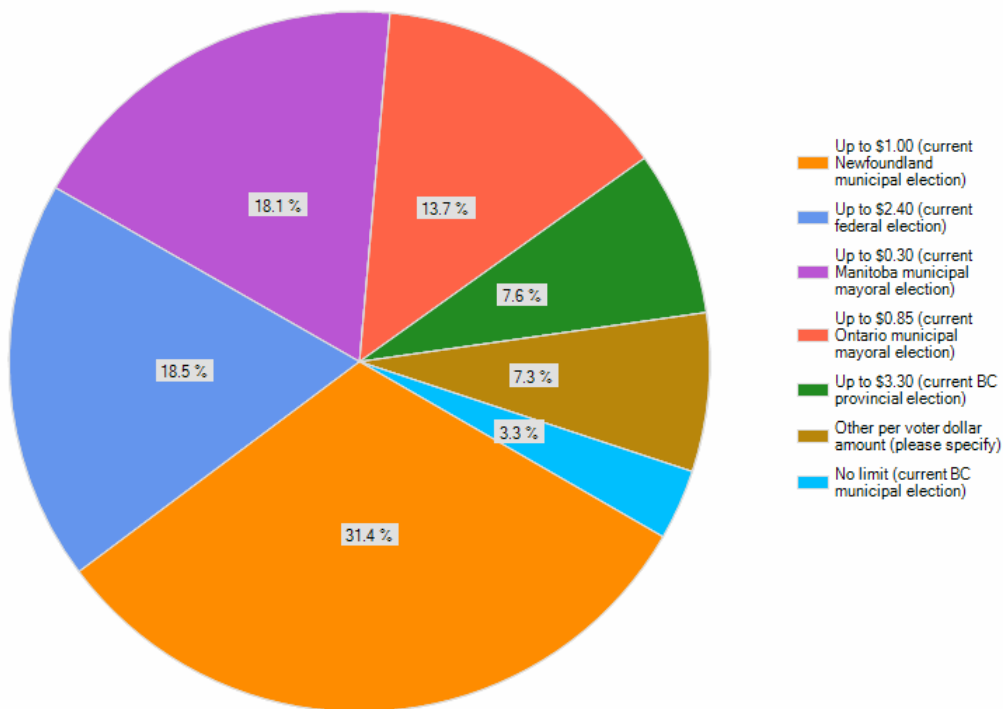
Think City believes that campaign spending limits will ensure a level playing field for all candidates and parties. Currently there are no spending limits for BC's local elections.

Federally, parties and their candidates are limited to approximately \$2.40 per elector. In BC, provincial parties and their candidates are limited to approximately \$3.30 per elector.

Other major Canadian cities have spending limits that range from \$0.30 to \$1.00 per elector. Except for Manitoba, there is also a minimum amount that candidates can spend in addition to the per elector amount. For mayoral campaigns, this ranges from \$5,400 to \$10,000.

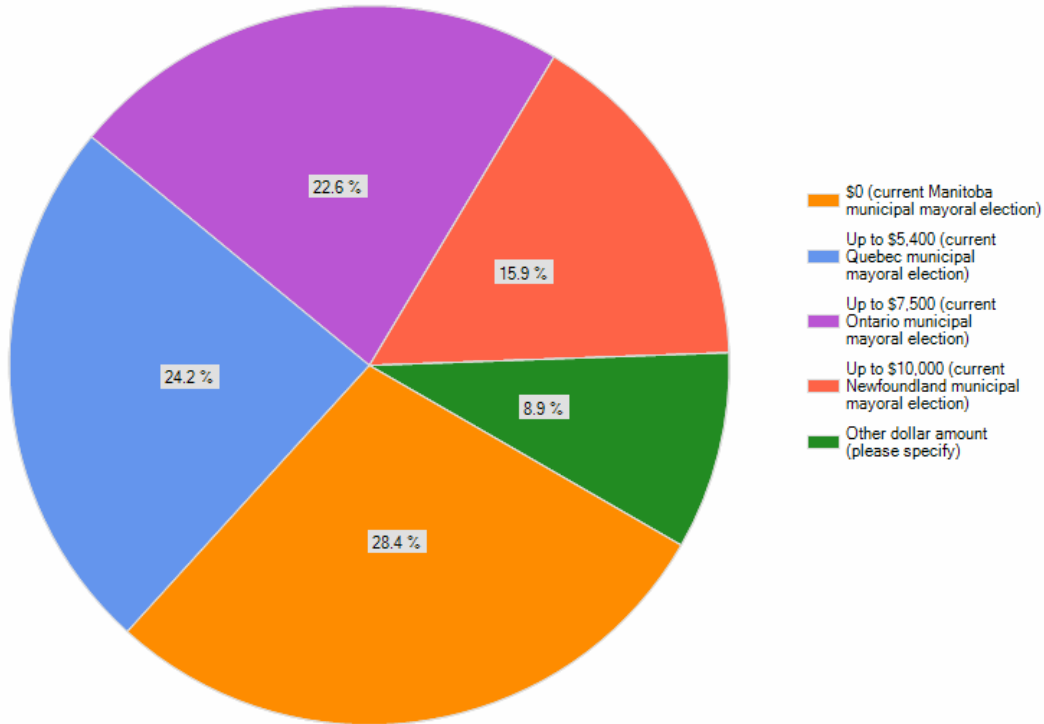
Think City asked survey participants what is an appropriate spending limit per registered voter for BC's municipal elections per candidate or party. Nearly 71 per cent want campaign spending limited to between \$0.85 and \$3.30 per voter per candidate or party.

Table 3 - Spending Limits I: What is an appropriate spending limit per registered voter?



Think City also asked what base limit in addition to the per voter limit should a mayoral candidate receive. Approximately 63 per cent favoured a base limit of between \$5,400 and \$10,000.

Table 4 - Spending Limit 2: What is the appropriate limit for a mayoral candidate in addition to the per voter spending limit?



Based on the support for these two measures and the public interest in ensuring there is a level playing field for all candidates and parties when it comes to campaign spending, Think City supports spending limits of up to \$3.30 per voter per candidate or party for BC’s local elections. As well, Think City supports an additional base limit of up to \$10,000 for all candidates running at-large.

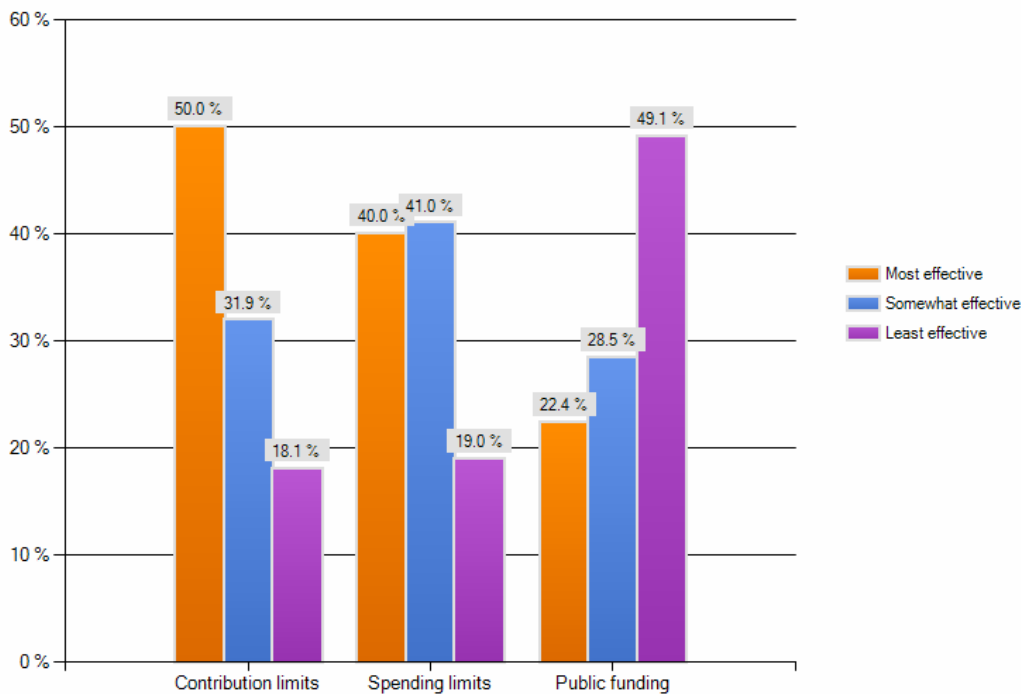
D. Campaign Financing in At-Large Elections

In British Columbia, we use a unique electoral system where each civic candidate must seek support from all electors in a municipality. At the federal and provincial levels and in most municipalities outside BC, all elected officials, except mayors, are elected from distinct geographic districts that contain a subset of voters from the country, province or municipality.

This means, that under the at-large system a single council candidate must market themselves to the entire electorate. For example, in BC’s largest municipality of Vancouver, there are over 400,000 electors that each candidate seeking a council or parks board seat must appeal to. If the goal of campaign finance reform is to reduce the real or perceived influence of large donors, what is the best combination of contribution limits, public funding and spending limits needed to achieve this goal in at-large electoral system?

Think City asked survey participants to rank the relative effectiveness of each of the three main campaign finance reforms. Contribution limits were seen to be the most effective tool while public funding was seen to be the least effective tool. Spending limits, despite being the middle choice were a close second to contribution limits. **Based on this ranking, Think City supports the use of contribution limits as the chief reform tool. Spending limits and public funding have a role to play as well, but without contribution limits, meaningful campaign finance reform at BC’s municipal level will be difficult to achieve.**

Table 5 - At-Large Electoral System Impact: Please rank the relative effectiveness of each of the three main campaign finance reforms. You may rank one, two or all three reforms.



E. Demographic Profile

A total of 1,025 British Columbians participated in Think City's 2010 Campaign Finance Reform Survey from May 11 to 21. In all, 57 per cent of survey participants are men and 40 per cent are women, while three per cent declined to answer. In terms of age, those aged 18 to 30 comprised 11 per cent, those aged 31 to 44 comprised 22 per cent, those aged 45 to 64 comprised 45 per cent, and those over 65 comprised 22 per cent.

Our survey respondents are generally highly educated and have above average incomes. Ninety-one per cent have completed at least two years of post-secondary education or technical training, and 70 per cent have an undergraduate or post-graduate university degree. Almost 63 per cent of participants have annual household incomes over \$50,000.

Think City survey participants are well informed about civic affairs and are very likely to vote in municipal elections.



F. About Think City

Launched in 2002, Think City believes citizens can make the best decision about the kind of city they want, when they are given the time, support and tools they need.

Think City works to:

- a) help citizens realize the issues facing their communities and develop collective solutions;
- b) facilitate the strengthening of civil societies within communities and across British Columbia;
- c) educate citizens on ways to protect their environment, strengthen local economies, and ensure the protection of individual rights and access to basic services; and
- d) provide communities with educational tools to assist in the long-term development of healthier societies.

As a result of our work, Think City has developed expertise in producing large-scale citizen participation exercises through public forums, workshops, surveys and hallmark conferences. More recently, Think City has expanded on its role as a civic issues convenor to begin developing policy solutions through our Dream Vancouver process that was launched in October 2007.

Our partners include academic institutions, trade unions, small businesses and other non-profit organizations who share our values. Our non-partisan, non-profit organization is run by a volunteer board that is elected each year.

G. Contact Information

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