



# Case Study 1: Women and the Vote

## ✘ Background information

The struggle for women to achieve their democratic rights and vote in provincial and federal elections took decades. Groups sprang up across the country to advocate for women's equality and their right to vote. The suffrage movement—the fight for women's voting rights—was especially motivated and organized on the Canadian Prairies, with Manitoba leading the way.

Manitoba women, like all women in Canada, were denied the vote after the province entered Confederation in 1870. Women's rights activism grew out of grassroots campaigns that spawned several suffrage groups and a number of dedicated leaders. The earliest women's rights organizations in the province were formed in Manitoba in the 1890s by women who had come from Iceland. Other groups supporting women's suffrage, such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, followed. They drew up petitions, and women lobbied Manitoba politicians to secure their support. Many people opposed these initiatives, but the movement towards suffrage had begun.

The momentum intensified when the Manitoba Political Equality League, founded in 1912, started its organized and highly creative campaign to press for women's rights. Led by notable women such as Nellie McClung, the League undertook a campaign to win the support of Manitobans and pressure the provincial government to grant women the right to vote. The members advanced their cause through alliances with other provincial groups, delivering educational lectures and organizing rallies and media promotions. They even held a satirical mock parliament. In 1915, the League collected over 40,000 names on a petition in favour of women getting the vote and delivered it to the premier and the Manitoba legislature.

The concerted actions of women (and men) across Manitoba had a major impact on the political and social climate of the province. In 1916, a bill was introduced by Premier Norris and passed by the legislature to offer some women in Manitoba the right to vote. (It did not apply to all women in the province, as they had to meet other eligibility criteria.)

Manitoba was the first jurisdiction in post-Confederation Canada to remove the gender barrier to voting. This was the first step in a decades-long journey to achieving voting rights for women throughout Canada.

## Key Dates for the Removal of Gender Barriers in Provincial and Federal Elections

The list of dates beside outlines some key milestones in the journey to women's voting rights in Canada.

Voting history is complex: gender was only one of the factors that determined who was eligible to vote at the federal and provincial level. At different times and in different parts of the country, other factors included Indigenous status, race, property ownership, religion, occupation and more.

We use the word "many" beside as a reminder that not all women received the right to vote when gender barriers were removed. They were excluded by other eligibility criteria that applied to both women and men. In particular, First Nations women and men were not afforded the right to vote until 1960, unless they gave up their status.

- **1916:** Many women in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta obtain the provincial vote.
- **1917:** Many women in British Columbia and Ontario obtain the provincial vote.
- **1917:** Women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces and women who are relatives of men in the military are able to vote in federal elections.
- **1918:** Many women across Canada obtain the federal vote.
- **1918:** Many Nova Scotia women obtain the provincial vote.
- **1919:** Many New Brunswick and Yukon women obtain the provincial or territorial vote.
- **1922:** Many Prince Edward Island women are able to vote in provincial elections.
- **1925:** Many women in Newfoundland and Labrador (which did not become part of Canada until 1949) are able to vote.
- **1940:** Many Quebec women obtain the provincial vote.
- **1950:** Inuit women (and men) obtain the right to vote.
- **1951:** Many women in the Northwest Territories obtain the right to vote at the territorial level.
- **1960:** First Nations women (and men) obtain the federal vote without conditions.
- **1982:** The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees all citizens the right to vote.

Please see another Elections Canada educational resource, *Voting Rights through Time*, for more information about inclusion, exclusion and voting rights at the federal level in Canada.

Visit [electionsanddemocracy.ca](http://electionsanddemocracy.ca).

## ✘ Potential Response Guide: Women and the vote

There is no single set of correct answers to the case study card placement activity in *Civic Action, Then and Now*. Many cards could comfortably fit in more than one category: the discussion and reasoning are more important than the answers.

However, here is one possible set of responses that may be helpful to teachers.

### Participating as an individual

1	<p><b>Sign a petition</b></p> <p>Individual women and men signed a petition in favour of Manitoba women getting the right to vote.</p>
2	<p><b>Collect signatures on a petition</b></p> <p>Amelia Burritt, age 93, personally collected over 4,000 names on a petition supporting Manitoba women’s right to vote.</p>
3	<p><b>Write articles for newspapers and magazines</b></p> <p>Francis Marion Beynon wrote a regular “women’s page” for the <i>Grain Growers Guide</i> that highlighted equality issues.</p>
4	<p><b>Donate money to support the cause</b></p> <p>Mary Hamble donated funds to the Manitoba Political Equality League, which promoted women’s right to vote.</p>
5	<p><b>Attend an event</b></p> <p>Women and men showed their support for women’s right to vote by attending meetings, rallies, lectures and social events.</p>

## Working Together as a Group

1	<p><b>Create a group of local supporters</b></p> <p>The Manitoba Political Equality League was founded to promote equality and obtain the right to vote for women in the province.</p>
2	<p><b>Join with national organizations</b></p> <p>Local women’s groups worked with national organizations such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union to help further their cause.</p>
3	<p><b>Hold group activities</b></p> <p>Manitoba women held social events or “Pink Teas” in their homes so women could discuss issues related to the struggle for equality.</p>
4	<p><b>Build alliances with others</b></p> <p>Manitoba women’s groups got support from other organizations, such as the Manitoba Grain Growers Association.</p>

## Building Public Support

1	<p><b>Give public talks</b></p> <p>Nellie McClung, a novelist and activist, went on speaking tours to promote her writings and women's voting rights.</p>
2	<p><b>Create a publication</b></p> <p>A monthly magazine, <i>Freyja</i> (which means "woman" in Icelandic), was published in Manitoba to educate readers about women's rights.</p>
3	<p><b>Take part in public events</b></p> <p>The Manitoba Political Equality League set up a booth at the Winnipeg Stampede, where they handed out pamphlets in favour of women getting the vote.</p>
4	<p><b>Attract attention through advertising</b></p> <p>The Manitoba Political Equality League ordered 100 banners to hang on Winnipeg streetcars as rolling ads.</p>
5	<p><b>Use humour to get noticed</b></p> <p>Women staged a mock parliament with a humorous debate on whether men should have the vote.</p>
6	<p><b>Collect signatures on a petition</b></p> <p>Women brought petitions to church meetings, family gatherings and fall fairs where they could persuade a lot of people to sign.</p>

## Working Through the Political System

1	<b>Speak to the legislature</b> Leaders of various organizations gave inspiring speeches in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.
2	<b>Get involved in election campaigns</b> Women volunteered to help provincial electoral candidates who would, if elected, support women's voting rights in the legislature.
3	<b>Present a petition</b> A petition with over 40,000 signatures was presented to the provincial premier to show there was political support for women's voting rights.
4	<b>Promote introduction of a bill</b> Activists convinced Premier Norris to introduce a bill in the Manitoba legislature to extend the vote to women in the province.
5	<b>Contact an elected member</b> Women contacted all members of the Manitoba legislature to demand that women get the right to vote and to run as provincial candidates.