

Gabriola Sounder Gabriola Votes:

Gabriola took on this project with less than four weeks before voting day for the 2025 Federal Election.

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What we did

In our print edition: we published an advertising-free 4-page section Q&A which was opened to all the candidates. We ensured people knew where our polling station was and what they needed to have with them to vote. Elections Canada removed this information from their advertising. We intended to support an on-island all candidates meeting, however with only two candidates willing to commit, we reassigned our reporter to cover the all-candidates meeting in Nanaimo. As all five candidates were attending we published a straight to web report of that meeting.

It was predicted our riding was one that likely to be seeing people make a strategic vote (vote splitting). In response to this, we moved forward with publishing an article from Dr. Stewart Prest (political science lecturer from UBC and CBC political analyst) discussing this topic. We also booked Dr. Prest to come to Gabriola in person to present a free pre-election lecture "Choice and Consequence: An overview of the 2025 election and its implications for voters" on Gabriola *in lieu* of the all-candidates meeting.

Democracy at school: We facilitated a student vote for grades 5,6, and 7 along with providing additional copies of the newspaper to the elementary school students to discuss in class and take home. The principal caught me while I was in the school and mentioned that one of his teachers had read a *Gabriola Sounder* editorial to their students. This was to start a discussion on responsible and respectful democracy, and to help address her class and their taking to cheering or jeering when sharing their political views in class.

Accessible vote: A healthy democracy is built on ensuring a barrier free vote for everyone. Rather than write a story after the election about a barrier limiting someone's access to vote - we worked to remove transportation barriers ahead of time. We worked with our local community bus organization to promote and support their offering for extra routes, and provided ridership on election day. The chosen voting location for Gabriola was at the South End of the island - a 20 minute drive from the centre of the community. 42 riders identified during General Election day as benefiting from free ridership.

Post election coverage: One of the post-discussion talks after Dr. Prest's lecture was asking how do we work together after the election? Fears of polarization were high, as was the desire to remain a united country. Post election coverage included publishing local and federal analysis from political scientist professor Lauren Touchant from Vancouver Island University. We also asked Dr. Prest for a follow up piece to provide clear explanation of polling results; how Modeling, Aggregations, and Polling Data are collected, used, referred to, and how what voters should be aware of when that data is referenced.

We were able to provide more than we would have to the community during this election through the support of this funding. We were also better positioned to respond as election events changed. Community news continues alongside an election and this funding gave us the courage to take on more; assign more stories, provide more news space, reach out to higher level subject matter experts and provide a quality in person guest lecture to our community. The process has given the Sounder the ability to further develop the journalism we can provide to our community to cover election reporting, how we can access additional subject matter experts for support, and given us more experience to draw on for the next event.

Sarah Holmes
Publisher,
Gabriola Sounder