Mapping the Experiences of Diverse Candidates Running for Municipal Office in Ontario

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AMO Association of Municipalities of Ontario

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Message from the AMO President

In late 2022, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) Board of Directors approved its Healthy Democracy Project for a 4-year period and with more than $1 million dollars in support funding.

The Healthy Democracy Project had grown from AMO's 2021-2022 pre-municipal election campaign, We All Win, to attract greater diversity in representation to municipal politics. The campaign was in recognition of the fact that Ontario's municipal councils are not representative of the diversity of the province and the populations municipal councils serve.

Additionally, several emerging trends led AMO's Board of Directors to support the development of AMO's Healthy Democracy Project:

1. Fewer people are voting and engaging in local democratic decision making.
2. Fewer people are running for municipal office and acclamations are on the rise.
3. As indicated, Ontario's municipal councils are not representative of the diverse populations they serve.
4. And AMO's members, Ontario's municipally elected officials, are increasingly dealing with hostile, unsafe work environments where political dialogue has become toxic and unproductive.

AMO understands these are complex and complicated issues. Addressing and reversing trends and systemic barriers will take time and is work that will not end, rather evolve. It is also work that requires effort from leaders and organizations apart from AMO.

But it needs to start somewhere. Building on the We All Win campaign, AMO assembled its Healthy Democracy Project Advisory Group to provide guidance and advice to support AMO in advancing the health of democracy in Ontario municipalities and with its members. The Advisory Group is composed of remarkable individuals including those with lived experience, academic and tactical expertise, and a shared commitment to advancing the health of democracy in Ontario municipalities.

To inform some of the initial priorities and deliverables of the HDP, and in lead up to the 2026 municipal elections, the Advisory Group and Board of Directors approved a one-of-its kind research project. Contracting with Monumental Projects, AMO has

undertaken research that delves into the experiences of those who have run or considered entering the local political arena, especially those from diverse, underrepresented communities who face the most barriers to political participation. The focus of the research is to gain insight into the challenges faced by diverse candidates and proposes a range of solutions AMO and our partners can consider as we work to build a healthier local democratic environment.

What emerges in this work is an outline of the often very difficult realities faced by those seeking to serve, and also a story of hope, resilience, and an urgent call to action. With this knowledge and insight shining a light on these challenges, comes an informed optimism grounded in growing partnerships and allies. The proposed solutions help inform the path forward—a path many are already walking with many more ready to join.

The Monumental research team was given the direction to not limit their findings to what AMO can influence or accomplish. We need to understand the full landscape of issues encountered by people trying to participate in local democracy. As such there are recommendations and ideas that fall outside of AMO's purview and will require the support of other groups with a shared commitment for improving the health of local democracies.

We appreciate our partners at Monumental Projects for the care and expertise they brought to this work. And our sincerest gratitude for everyone who shared their stories and ideas with us. Know that we value and respect your knowledge, time, and hard-earned wisdom.

On behalf of AMO,

Thank you.

Colin Best
AMO President

Executive Summary

An Initiative of AMO's Health Democracy Project

From Summer 2023 to Spring 2024, Monumental conducted the ***Mapping the Experiences of Diverse Candidates Running for Municipal Office in Ontario*** research project on behalf of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO). This research was situated within AMO's Healthy Democracy Project (launched in 2022). The problem frame that guided this work was as follows:

"How might AMO create recommendations that the association - and its partners - can implement to close the experience gap of diverse individuals running for municipal office across Ontario?"

As the most diverse province in Canada, and one of the most diverse societies in the Western world, Ontario's present and future success is interconnected to our ability to engage the potential, brilliance and innovation of our residents. This imperative makes having representative participation from diverse individuals in municipal politics essential. When we use the language of "diverse" in this project we define it widely to include people who are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Persons of Colour), women, non-binary, transgender, 2SLGBTQ+, English as a second language, newcomers to Canada, lower income, neurodivergent, living with physical disabilities, and holding non-Christian religious or spiritual affiliations.

Currently, diverse representation in municipal leadership of Ontario's cities, towns, and rural communities lags behind the diversity of our population. This is the case whether you live in the eastern region, western region, northern region, central region, or right in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). At the same time, polarization, harassment and toxicity are rising in Canadian politics. Most soberingly, our work suggests that as much as Ontarians take pride in the growing diversity and inclusivity of our society, strong factors may actually be slowing or reversing progress to diversify municipal councils. Many diverse candidates and potential candidates voiced perceptions that increasingly, there are more risks than rewards to stepping forward to run for office. This report contributes to helping us understand how we can stem the tide, removing barriers to participation while leveraging the assets diverse candidates bring.

Our Research Approach

To explore these critical issues, we engaged with diverse individuals in Ontario who were: (1) deciding to run, (2) running for office, and (3) successful in obtaining political office. We complemented these groups by engaging with sector partners and community leaders. Through a mixed methods approach, we probed the journey that candidates go through to

enter office, exploring their motivations, assets, and barriers. The insights we gained through this primary data collection helped us craft a series of potential interventions that AMO and partners can prototype to advance the aims of the Healthy Democracy project.

What We Learned

The findings from our research are organized around **Common Motivations**, **Common Enablers and Assets,** and **Common Barriers** when running for office.

- *Common Motivations*
    Subjects shared a variety of motivations, including **identity-based motivations** such as a desire to increase representation in their local governments, a familial or childhood engagement with politics, and a desire to change the status quo for their communities. We also encountered **policy motivations,** such as a desire to change local legislation in support of community needs, as well as **place-based motivations** connected to the proximity of municipal politics to observable impacts for residents.

- *Common Enablers and Assets*
    A number of different assets emerged from our research including the benefits of being **rooted in community, identity-based or professional groups,** having **advocates and mentors** with existing ties to the political system, the importance of **financing** and previous roles that served as a **proof of concept** of an ability to lead. Support from **families, friends and community,** and the critical importance of **timing** was also cited**.**

- *Common Barriers*
    General barriers included **financial barriers, lack of access to social capital** and bad **timing** (family conflicts, career conflicts, running against an incumbent). Other barriers that were particularly salient for diverse candidates included the **mental health toll of discrimination, bullying, and harassment,** and specific **accessibility barriers** faced by those with mobility issues and/or neurodivergence.

Prototype Ideas

Research participants suggested possible interventions (in this report, we use the language of "prototypes") to improve the experiences of diverse candidates running for municipal office in Ontario:

- **Ways to Better Support Diverse Candidates**: These prototypes address the ways in which diverse candidates can be better supported through their municipal politics

journey in areas such as capacity building, enhanced social/financial capital supporting safety and wellness.

- **Shifting the Mainstream Culture & Environmental Context**: These prototypes tackle the need for larger cultural shifts within Ontario municipalities and politics in order to be more welcoming to diverse candidates.
- **Systemic Changes & Advocacy Stances:** These prototypes explore more systemic changes within Ontario municipal politics that AMO can take on as advocacy stances.

While our study encountered a number of very real barriers that exist to increasing the diversity of Candidates in municipal office in Ontario, it's also clear that diverse communities have many assets and allies willing to support their journeys into office. We believe this report is one of many interventions currently underway that can help stem the tide against toxicity, disengagement and polarization, and support the creation of municipal governance systems that more fully reflects Ontario's diverse tapestry of human experiences.

Context

In the summer of 2023, Monumental Projects was retained by the Association of Municipalities in Ontario (AMO) to convene a series of research and engagement activities to understand the state of representation and diversity within municipal politics in Ontario. It was a study grounded in the experiences of diverse candidates as they navigate Ontario's varied municipal political environments.

AMO works to make municipal governments stronger and more effective. Through AMO, Ontario's 444 municipalities work together to achieve shared goals and meet common challenges. Through AMO's policy development, cost-saving programs, conferences and training opportunities, the organization provides municipal officials with tools to succeed, and programs to help maximize taxpayer dollars.

This research project - ***Mapping the Experiences of Diverse Candidates Running for Municipal Office in Ontario*** - is part of AMO's Healthy Democracy Project. Launched in 2022, the Healthy Democracy Project is a four-year project approved by AMO's Board of Directors to advance AMO's commitment to: more equitable representation and participation in municipal governance in Ontario, increased respect for and health of local democracy, and a better public understanding of the important role of local governments.

This research sits within a workstream of the Healthy Democracy Project called the *We All Win* campaign. This campaign builds from an understanding that Democracy is healthy when everyone is able to participate fully and safely in the development and wellbeing of their communities. Better decisions are made when the voices of diverse genders and identities, ethnicities, races, sexual orientations, ages and abilities are heard and represented around Ontario's municipal council tables. *We All Win* is supported by additional work streams around Civic Education and Engagement and also training opportunities around respectful dialogue and participatory democracy. The campaign set the following objectives:

- Increase diversity on municipal councils to be more reflective of Ontario's diversity.
- Support AMO members through their diversity, equity, and inclusion journey.
- Elected officials are equity-informed leaders.
- People running for office don't feel alone and have recourse when they experience harassment and/or discrimination.

Monumental's research was undertaken with the intention of creating an evidence base to support the development of interventions that AMO could prototype over the coming years.

Built directly from the motivations, enablers, barriers and needs that were shared by our research participants, these prototypes will help shape AMO's long-term commitment to support diverse representation in Ontario's local governments. AMO has also underscored that this work has become more important than ever. Over the period of the research project, the province of Ontario witnessed increasing challenges with political leadership and respect for local democracy. Increasingly, AMO is hearing from their membership about the challenges they face around rising vitriol and hostility in local politics and the perceived diminishing returns from stepping into local leadership. Within the context of promoting more diversity in municipal leadership, general challenges around our democratic culture and the realities of holding elected office become even more concerning.

Current State of Municipal Elections and Governments in Ontario

When it comes to understanding the experiences of diverse candidates in Ontario municipalities, there are major gaps in the existing research. Professor Zack Taylor of Western University, one of Canada's leaders in studying municipal politics, reported to our research team that while some work has been done exploring the impacts of being a racially or ethnically diverse candidate in Canada at the Federal level, municipal research in the Ontario context is extremely sparse. With regard to the representation of people with disabilities in political participation, Dr. Mario Velesque acknowledged that persons with disabilities are the largest minority group in North America, yet little is known about the political participation of this important group of citizens. The Canadian political participation literature focusing on persons with disabilities is thin, with only a handful of studies in the academic literature, largely focused on accessibility issues. Most of the available research and verifiable quantitative data about diversity in municipal politics is almost exclusively focused on women - an important area of study but only one component of diversity.

By reviewing headshots of politicians and their online biographies, academics and journalists have attempted to give us a rough snapshot of representation in municipal councils. The results both locally and nationally are concerning. Within Ontario, studies have shown numerous municipalities with zero representation from racialized individuals and in many cases councils with less than 50% women elected[1]. The same issue of limited representation in municipal councils is observable even in Toronto, Ontario's largest city and one of the world's most diverse, where a 2018 an examination of the identity of political leaders showed that despite 51.5% of the population identifying as visible minorities, the

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[1] See also *Why don't we have more women in Muskoka's municipal council seats?* https://www.muskokaregion.com/news/why-dont-we-have-more-women-in-muskokas-municipal-council-seats/article_4caa1015-2608-5c6e-8084-2d52c46e1917.html and *Female Representation* https://www.thestandardnewspaper.ca/post/female-representation

council elected in 2018 was 90% White. The issue is also Canada-wide. In Montreal, where 31% of the population is a visible minority, 94% of the city council elected is White. In Vancouver, where 54% of the population identify as visible minorities in 2021, 90% of the elected council is White. Beyond ethnic/racial identity and gender identity, there is almost no data for many other forms of diversity like sexual orientation or religious background. Despite major gaps, it's clear from today's publicly available data that Ontario has a long way to go to achieve municipal councils that tap into the insights, ideas and wisdom of diverse communities representative of Ontario's population. It's this reality that this research seeks to respond to.

Polarization, Harassment, and Toxic Discourse
The lack of representation mentioned above and more general barriers to running for office (which will be explored in-depth in future sections of this report) all exist in the context of rising concerns about polarization and toxicity in Canadian politics. As an editorial published in August 2022 by the Toronto Star noted, from coast to coast, Canadian politicians are facing increased in-person harassment and threats, often driven through online vitriol. Alessia Passfiume noted in 2023, that protests specifically against transgender and LGBTQ+ rights have been increasing in the country, accompanied by increasingly toxic discourse experienced by politicians from LGBTQ identities. Egale Canada - an advocacy organization for LGBTQ+ people and issues - reported more than 6,400 anti-LGBTQ+ protests and instances of online hate in the first three months of 2023 alone. As a specific example, Press Progress in 2022 noted how municipal political candidates in Ottawa who are members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community faced a coordinated campaign of homophobia, transphobia, and harassment online. Meanwhile at the Federal level, a 2023 report noted how harassment and violence against women is increasingly a reality in our election campaigns. As with all issues of diversity, multiple identities can intersect to create even more compounded challenges. For example, as Ashley Okwuosa noted in her piece *That's how you do it: Black women in Ontario politics — past, present, and future*, the hostile environment that exists in Ontario politics is forcing Black women out of party politics, even though parties claim to prioritize diversity they are not giving the supports needed to help these candidates thrive in the current environment.[2] Finally, all of this general toxicity exists in a context where misinformation and disinformation continues to be spread during elections.

These issues were not simply confronted by our research team in media reports and academic articles. Throughout our primary research, we heard time and time again about the reality of threats, harassment, bullying and discriminatory treatment as experienced in the personal journeys of those we interviewed. The confluence of low representation for diverse candidates and an increasingly hostile political environment creates an entrenched challenge that those who wish to diversify municipal elections in Ontario must face.

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[2] "Political parties say 'come,' because they're Black women, and they bring their unique experiences. However, political parties don't want them to bring their whole selves; they want them to bring pieces of themselves."

The Risk-Reward Paradox

All of these realities bring home a disturbing reality: the fact that it's not certain that over time it is becoming easier for diverse candidates to thrive in municipal politics in Ontario. Potential candidates we spoke to conduct a mental calculus of the risk-to-reward trade-offs of entering political life before deciding to run. In this calculus, they determine if the possible rewards to running for office outweigh the personal risks. Our findings suggest a possibly negative trend, with diverse candidates increasingly perceiving more risks than rewards within political life. While Canada is becoming increasingly diverse as a nation, and while Canadian views on issues such as race, sexual identity, and immigration[3] have become more inclusive over recent decades (with the exception of slight recent drops in support for immigration levels), running for political office has not necessarily become more accessible or inclusive at the same rate. In fact, as the trends mentioned above highlight, politics can be quite nasty and unforgiving. So while populations in general may be more receptive to diverse candidates, political polarization, harassment, and a lack of privacy due to social media[4] may actually be making running for political office *less* appealing overall to *all* candidates than in previous years, and even more so for diverse candidates. As such, diversifying municipal elected office in Ontario cannot be assumed to simply happen on its own over time, but will require concentrated efforts by those passionate about having a more representative democracy.

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[3] OCASI reports on 20 years of Canada accepting refugee claimants on the basis of persecution based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Retrieved from https://ocasi.org/sites/default/files/making-lgbti-refugee-protectoin-claim-canada_0.pdf

[4] "Politicians at all levels are subject to aggressive harassment, but municipal candidates often have fewer resources to protect themselves from online harassment, Wagner added, making it more challenging to navigate."

Methodology: What We Did

Problem Framing & Research Questions

Building from the foundational need to produce more research informed by the lived experiences of diverse candidates running for municipal office in Ontario, Monumental Projects and AMO engaged in a collaborative problem-framing exercise, defining the project's problem frame, research questions, scope, and priority participants for primary research activities. The following framework emerged.

Problem Frame:

How might AMO create a set of recommendations that they - and their partners - can pursue in order to close the experience gap of diverse individuals running for municipal office in Ontario?

Research Question 1. When considering diverse Ontario municipal political candidates in three contexts: (1) deciding to run, (2) running for office, (3) being in office:
- What are common motivations to run for office?
- What assets make you electable in Ontario?
- What barriers do people face? What are their underlying needs?

Mapping the journey into municipal office

Deciding to Run

What are the barriers?What are the underlying needs?

Who decides to run? Why? Who doesn't run?

Running for Office

What are the barriers? What are the underlying needs?

Who wins municipal elections? Why? Who doesn't win?

Being in Office

What are the barriers? What are the underlying needs?

Who stays in office? Why? Who doesn't stay?

· What are the assets that make you electable in Ontario? ·

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Research Question 2. What does the process of deciding to run for office, running a campaign, and (if successful) attaining office look like? What are the choice points and major milestones on this journey, specifically for diverse candidates?

Research Question 3. What are the intervention points along this journey that would be most impactful for AMO to develop prototypes (i.e., initiatives, resources, etc.) to narrow the experience gap of diverse candidates?
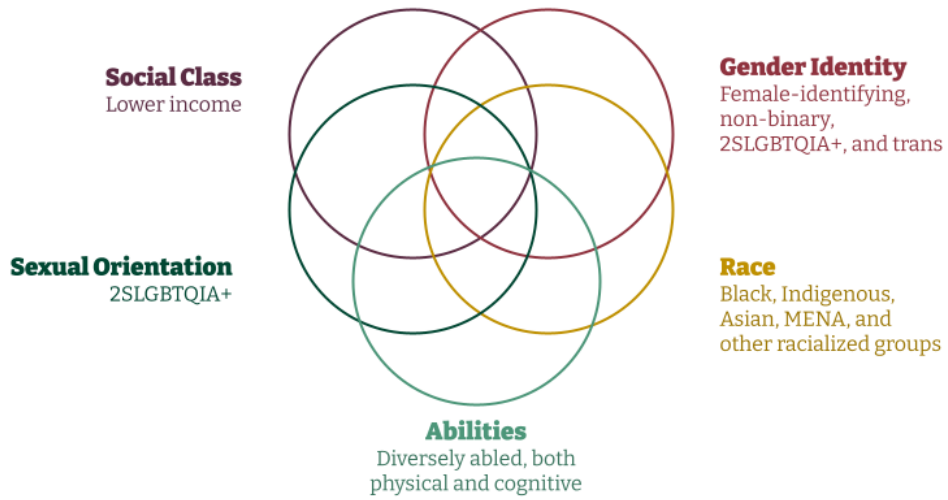
Priority Participants: Diverse Candidates

Desk research preceded primary research activities and sought to map out the existing information and data sets describing both the representation and experiences of diverse candidates in Ontario. For the purposes of this research, *diverse candidates* was defined as individuals belonging to equity-deserving groups, including but not limited to people who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Persons of Colour), women, non-binary, transgender, 2SLGBTQ+, English as a second language, newcomers to Canada, lower income, neurodivergent, living with physical disabilities, and non-Christian religious or spiritual affiliations.

Building from our understanding of existing research, our primary research sought to gain deeper, nuanced, qualitative insights about the lived experiences of diverse citizens who have navigated the municipal politics landscape in Ontario. By understanding their unique experiences, AMO can co-create interventions that make municipal politics more accessible and welcoming.

Our primary research focused on lesser-studied identity groups and individuals with intersectional identities. Identity often shapes an individual's awareness of key issues because of our lived experiences; women are more aware of misogyny, racialized persons are more aware of racism, and people living with disabilities are more aware of ableism. People living across several equity-deserving identities are therefore more likely in tune with the complexities and interrelationships of various social dynamics at play.

For the interviews and focus groups, we were especially interested in speaking to people who belong to more than one equity-deserving group, acknowledging they may carry particularly nuanced insights about the lived experiences of diverse candidates in Ontario. The following graphic is an illustration of intersectional identities, but is not comprehensive of all the identity groups engaged.

Intersectionality of diverse candidate identities

Social Class
Lower income

Gender Identity
Female-identifying,
non-binary,
2SLGBTQIA+, and trans

Sexual Orientation
2SLGBTQIA+

Race
Black, Indigenous,
Asian, MENA, and
other racialized groups

Abilities
Diversely abled, both
physical and cognitive

Methodologies & Data Collection Tools

Approach

Problem Framing

Define the scope of our
research question(s),
population
segmentation, and
desired outcomes.

Desk Research

Understand the
existing body of
knowledge, who is well
researched, and what
themes are well
reported. Where are the
gaps in knowledge?

Primary Research

In-depth exploration of
the experiences of
less-researched,
highly-barried
individuals.

Phase 1. Desk Research

The team began by reviewing existing research documents across the following themes:

- **Gender Identity and Gender Expression** in Municipal Politics
- **Sexual Orientation and Representation** in Municipal Politics
- **Cultural Diversity and Racial Inequity** in Municipal Politics:
- **Diversely-Abled Communities** in Municipal Politics
- **Economically Marginalized Communities and Class Difference** in Municipal Politics

Through this exercise, the team built an initial view into the commonly understood barriers, assets, and underlying needs of diverse candidates, along with a list of research gaps. The desk research also uncovered several frames and approaches that were carried forward into primary research, including:

- Financial capital[5] and social capital[6][7] as major indicators of candidate success[8]
- Affinity voting[9]
- Social networks, group formations, and brand recognition[10]

Major research gaps were identified during the desk research phase, with relatively few studies about municipal politics and diverse candidates produced within the province of Ontario. A majority of available research was produced in the United States, and available Canadian research was largely reported from the federal and provincial levels. Furthermore, our team was not able to locate existing research produced from the lived

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[5] Financial capital in an election environment can be defined as the total money available to a candidate to fund various campaigning activities. It includes both donations and personal financing. It is often put toward expenses like the production of multimedia materials, online communications, media features, purchasing signs, food for volunteers t-shirts and other merchandise, hiring a campaign firm, and tuition for political training programs like campaign schools.

[6] Social capital is defined as 'the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively." Hellerstein, J.K. & Neumark, D. (2020). *IZA DP No. 13413: Social Capital, Networks, and Economic Wellbeing*. Retrieved from https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/13413/social-capital-networks-and-economic-wellbeing#:~:text=One%20definition%20of%20social%20capital,that%20society%20to%20function%20effectively%22

[7] In an campaigning environment, social capital includes access to networked individuals, mentors and gatekeepers who can open doors into the municipal political realm, reputational standing within the community in which you are running, access to volunteers to help you run your campaign, membership in professional networks and labour unions, and support from a broad base who will drive people to the voting booths on your behalf.

[8] Election observers have long contended that "money is the lifeblood of politics" and how political donations provide resources that help candidates win elections, but they also matter in nonmaterial ways. Campaign donations suggest candidates have electoral support, and this signaling can influence voter evaluations of a campaign's credibility and viability. Burrell, Barbara C. (2014). Gender in Campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.

[9] Affinity voting is a phenomenon where citizens are more likely to vote for candidates with shared identity traits. Albaugh et.al. (2023). "Gender and LGBT Affinity Effects". In *Politics and Gender*

[10] Zack Taylor discussed how resource mobilization and being connected to a social network is a critical component to help advance one's campaign, and how in his research on understanding the state of elections and campaigns he asks specific questions related to an individual's social networks, the occupation of members within the network, and how many volunteers have been mobilized. Zack also speaks about the role of brand recognition and the role it plays in amplifying a candidates profile- the top of this being incumbency (and all the advantages associated with being an incumbent), as well as one's ability to access radio talk shows in the area, being a civic leader, or a notable figure (that can include being a principal if you are running for office in a small town). Zack Taylor. Key Informant Interview by Ariel Sim, Kofi Hope, Benjamin Bongolan, and Eli Rose. Monumental Projects. September 2023.

experiences of diverse candidates in Ontario; available research about municipal politics was predominantly produced using survey data.

Phase 2. Primary Research

To fill the research gaps in the existing body of knowledge, our team selected the following primary research tools. To note, our research is a small contribution and jumping off point that we hope will inspire further study and participatory engagement. By collecting data from 118 individuals, including 28 who took part in either an in-depth qualitative interview or focus group, this work helps to inform ongoing research gaps and blindspots about the experiences and needs of diverse candidates at the municipal level.
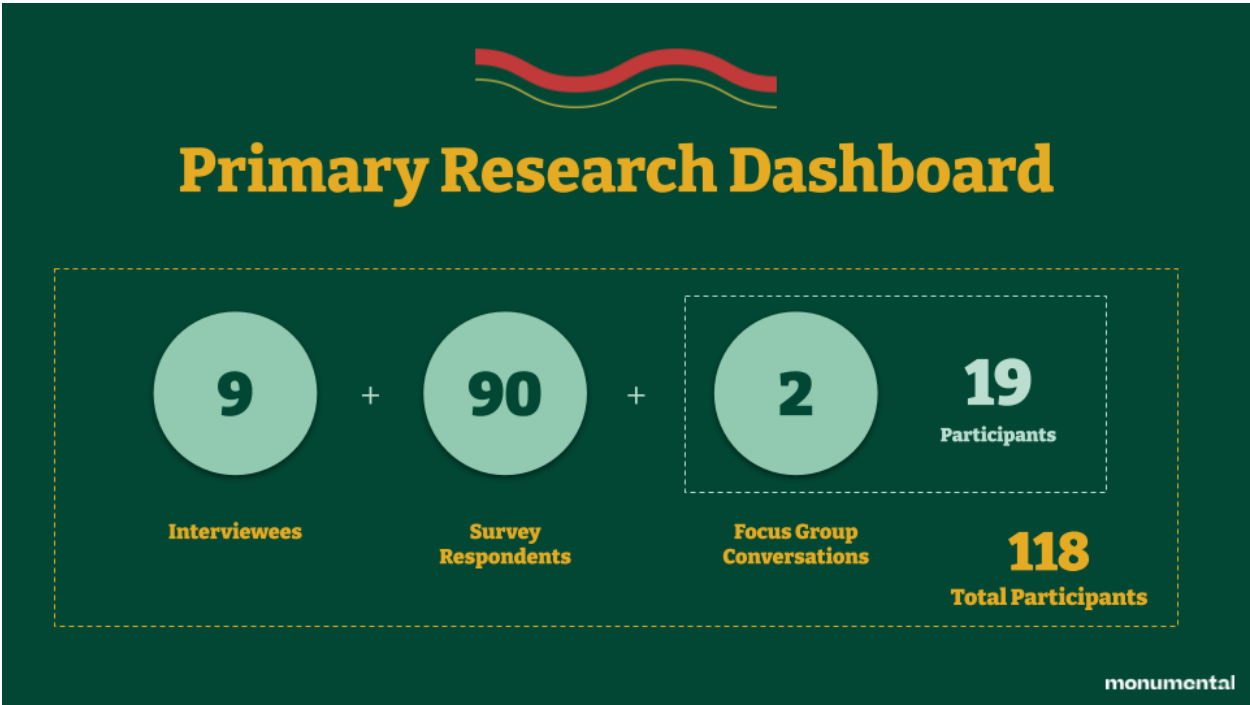
A. Survey

A total of ninety (90) people responded to a survey that was open from November 2023 - January 2024. The majority of respondents were White women from rural areas of Ontario, providing a basis of reportable data from that demographic group. The survey collected (1) demographic information (age, gender, equity-deserving groups, race/ethnicity, spiritual/religious affiliation, profession, education level, household dependents), (2) municipal political profile (region of Ontario, what role they considered running or ran for, if they ran, won or lost), and (3) assets and barriers (respondent were asked to identify their top assets and barriers from lists developed from the desk research findings, and were

prompted to provide more details via open-ended questions). See **Appendix A. Key Findings from the Survey**.

B. In-Depth Interviews

A total of nine (9) in-depth interviews were conducted with diverse candidates who have lived experience running for office in AMO constituent municipalities across the province of Ontario, and with one potential candidate who considered running but decided not to. The central methodology of the in-depth interviews was journey mapping (exploring both the timeline and emotional experience of events) with the hope of:

- Gaining a deeper understanding of individuals' motivations, barriers, assets, and **underlying needs**
- Mapping the **current state experience** of diverse folks deciding to run and running for office
- Brainstorming ways to make the experience of running for office better (**prototype ideas**)

A note about journey mapping

This project used a combination of traditional research and design research methods. Journey mapping was intentionally chosen to elicit a more tacit, emotional landscape of the interviewee's experience. In the interviews, participants were asked to draw a map of the significant events across their personal journey, and how they felt in those moments.

The research team found that these maps provided the opportunity to go deeper into parts of the experience that participants might not have thought were interesting or relevant to the dialogue, but actually provided nuanced insights about the emotional labour involved in engaging in municipal politics. Abstractions of the journey maps are distributed throughout this document to highlight notable themes in the research. We have abstracted the maps in order to consider the anonymity of our research participants.

C. Focus Groups

The Monumental research team hosted two (2) focus groups, with a total of 19 participants. Focus Group 1 was hosted for **Organizations Serving Diverse Candidates and Experienced Individuals.** These explored common assets and barriers for diverse candidates running for municipal office in Ontario and brainstormed initiatives to improve the experience of running and the possible outcomes for diverse candidates in Ontario (prototype ideas). The group consisted of community leaders deeply involved in advancing equity and representation within municipal politics. They represented many intersectional identities,

cultural backgrounds and professional sectors. Some participants had direct experience in municipal office while a majority of participants had been part of grassroots and non-profit groups to help capture a more diverse range of perspectives and representation on the current state of diversity amongst elected officials.

The second focus group engaged **Potential Candidates** for municipal office. We discussed the group's thoughts and perceptions around municipal government and the prospect of running for municipal office, possible motivations to run in the future, and brainstorming ways that AMO and other organizations might encourage and support diverse candidates to run for municipal office in Ontario (prototype ideas). The participants were largely young professionals with strong leadership experience. Some of the participants had previously considered running for municipal office and for others, the focus group was their first exploration of the possibility.

The insights from these focus groups have been woven into the insights described below and a detailed summary of each focus group is available in **Appendix B. Key Takeaways from Focus Group 1: Organizations Serving Diverse Candidates & Experienced Individuals;** and **Appendix C. Key Takeaways from Focus Group 2: Potential Candidates.**

Limits to the Approach

Limits to the research approach include the following:
- Working with small sample sizes is an intentional research design that facilitates the collection of rich data directly from people's lived experiences. This approach allowed the team to unearth latent needs and insights that would not be collected through traditional survey data. However, the small sample size of the research effort also limits the generalizability of the findings.
- The research team gathered data and insights from individuals across a broad range of regions in Ontario (Central, Eastern, Northeastern, Northwestern, Southwestern) and equity-deserving groups. It appears that there are distinct features of municipal politics based on the region and identity group, but further study is needed to flesh out these trends.
- The lists of common barriers and assets used in the survey were developed based on the desk research phase. A new survey could be developed with updated lists of common assets and barriers informed by both the desk research and primary research presented in this report.
- Furthermore, survey data would benefit from a longer window of participation and more targeted recruitment. A new survey could be distributed to a larger base of past, present, and potential diverse candidates in each region of Ontario in order to develop a strong base of evidence supporting AMO's understanding of unique experiences based on both region and identity.

One racialized person who held office in a mid-sized town noted that the experience of running and holding office feels a lot like a rollercoaster. On top of the overall highs and lows across the experience of running and holding office, there are many ups and downs along the way. Getting involved in municipal politics requires emotional fortitude, regardless if you win or lose.

First Campaign

Elected to Office

Being in office (4 years)

Re-Election Campaign
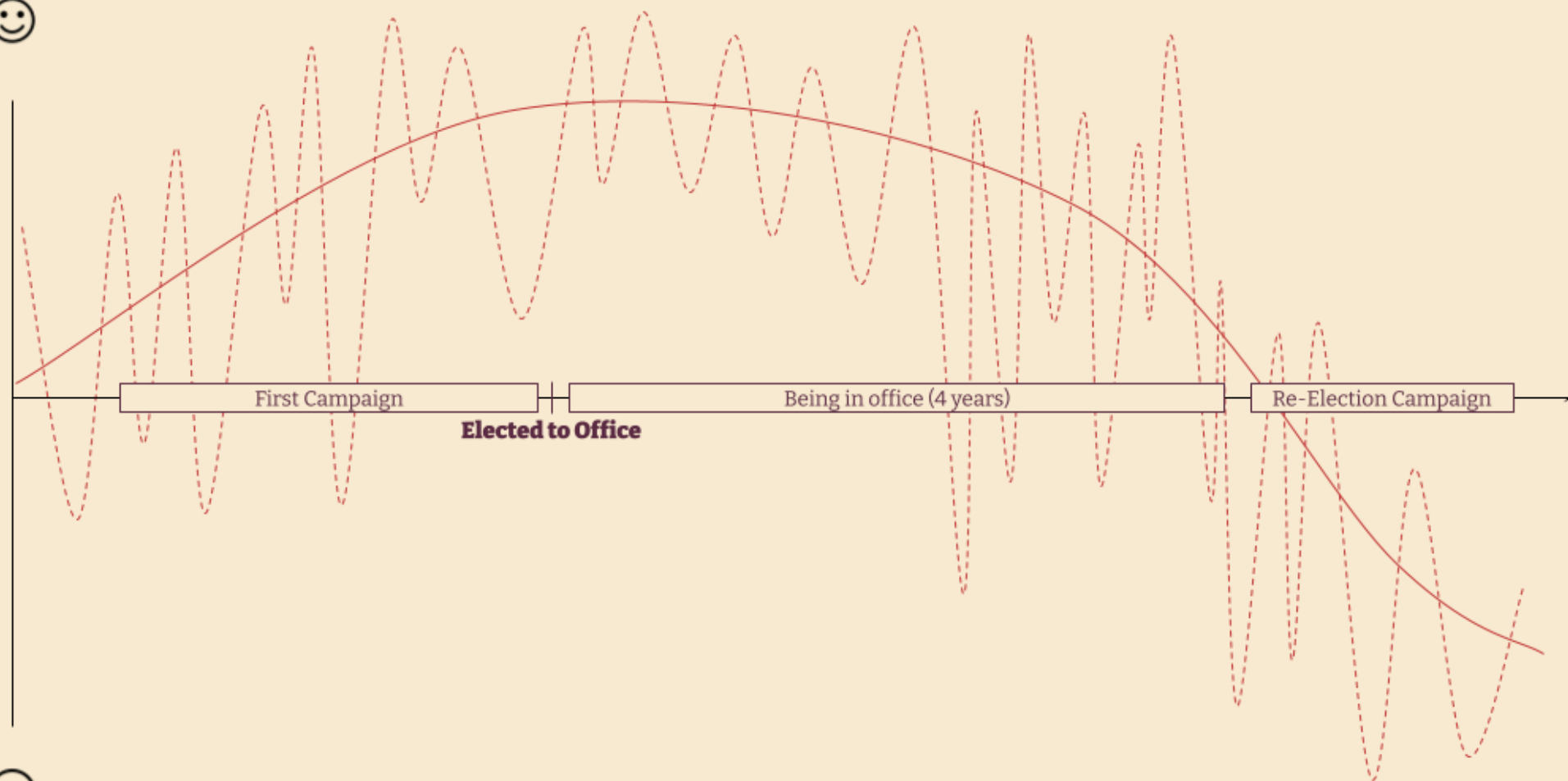
Key Themes & Insights

Common Motivations

This chapter explores common motivations to run for municipal office mentioned by the diverse candidates who participated in our research, broken into three broad categories: (1) identity-based motivations, (2) policy motivations, and (3) place-based motivations.

Identity-Based Motivations

Increasing Representation of Diverse Communities in Government

Some diverse candidates sought municipal office to address issues of diversity and representation. There was a resounding desire amongst participants to see "more people who look like me" in positions of government and authority across the political landscape in Ontario. In our conversations, participants shared their desires to address underrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, neurodivergent, diversely-abled, transgender, Muslim, women and other groups, by taking the initiative to run themselves. For them, the journey through municipal politics became an exercise in elevating voices from their community, advocating for their communities' needs, and changing the civic culture to be more welcoming and fair. They wanted to show that good leadership doesn't necessarily mean White leadership.

One participant shared a conversation they had with a young boy in their community that catalyzed their decision to run; he said: "I've never seen anyone who looks like you before. I don't know what to do with you or what to say to you." Some participants discussed their experiences working and volunteering within political offices and witnessing first hand an extreme lack of diversity and representation across clerical and leadership levels. One participant worked in a political office that had no diverse leadership for many years and expressed how frustrating it was not to see other racialized and Indigenous people in these particular roles. It was common for the political office to practice land acknowledgements, but there were no Indigenous staffers. This motivated the participant to intentionally seek out diverse candidates to coach and support during their political campaigns. Another participant noted that, while working in a neighborhood coalition, they realized the importance of being a candidate, to inspire and support others.

Family History of Political Leadership & Childhood Factors

Some participants had a family history of leadership in various levels of government, perhaps creating a sense of familiarity and belonging within the political realm. These participants mentioned immediate and extended family members with deep roots in their municipality/region, personal mentors, and networks that included political leaders. As a

result, some of these participants had opportunities to attend committee meetings and other government events, deepening their sense of awareness and connection to municipal politics.

Other participants shared early childhood memories that sparked their interest in pursuing government, political and social change careers. Many remembered being politically aware from a young age, whether from natural inclination or from specific lived experiences. One participant noted their experiences immigrating to Canada as a young child, watching the Berlin wall fall and feeling they wanted to do work that brings people together. Another participant had difficulty navigating the Canadian school system as a young child, mis-labeled as English as a second language; this opened their eyes to the need for better cross-cultural communication in schools and social support for newcomers. Another participant grew up in a community widely known for crime, determined to change the narrative of what outcomes are possible for marginalized people.

Demonstrating Better Leadership / Disappointment with the Status Quo
Some participants noted their personal disappointment with the status quo of municipal leadership, vocalizing how they felt politicians in their community would make campaign promises to their constituents around election time but ultimately never delivered. Some participants also voiced the concern that municipal staff who didn't live locally acted unaccountable to the needs of the residents; feeling they were actually closer and more committed to their community's needs. For these participants, running for municipal office was an opportunity to demonstrate what they felt would be a better type of leadership at this level of government; one that's more connected, action-oriented and follows through.

Policy Motivations

Making a Difference for Diverse Communities Through Policy Change
Some participants were motivated by specific policy issue areas. Their platforms included zoning laws, accessibility policies[11] and challenging the backsliding of environmental policies protecting the Greenbelt. In our conversations, we heard about the power of municipal politics and "the impact it can have on people's lives when good ideas are implemented through policy." Participants shared their desires to create policies that would contribute to systems change and improve current conditions for constituents, with one participant sharing that they wanted to "make their city a more accessible place by introducing policies that improve the lives of folks with disabilities." We also heard a

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[11] Disabled citizens support healthcare spending: The findings reveal that disabled citizens and candidates are more supportive of healthcare and general public spending, even within parties. Reher, Stefanie. (2022). "Do Disabled Candidates Represent Disabled Citizens?" British Journal of Political Science 52 (2). Cambridge University Press: 520–34. doi:10.1017/S0007123420000733.

This research participant was the first non-binary councillor to be elected in their ward, motivated to resolve the lack of accessibility and supports available to people living with disabilities in their community.

Won: They were elected and asked the other candidates what are your top three goals. Made a promise to have them realized.

Signed Up: Talked to a lot of councillors and went to municipal campaign school. At the time it was a women's focused cohort.

Accessibility Committee: Joined an accessibility committee. This was a space to discuss issues related to supports for people with disabilities. They also started to more widely organize with the online community.

Friends with Candidate: Eventually became friends with other candidates that were being harassed and formed a support network amongst one another.

Asked to Run: Would regularly call a local councillor to talk about issues and concerns. When the councillor retired, they were asked to run.

Health: Moved to their community for health reasons.

Volunteer: Had about 25 volunteers, and had about 45 people make donations.

Decided to Run

Term 1

Bad Policies: A lack of support for people with disabilities and issues around the Greenbelt contributed to their desire to make change.

Neighbourhood Coalition: Realized the importance of being a candidate, to inspire and support others.

The Attack: During the course of the campaign, they were attacked by another candidate.

Online Community-Building: Connected with a lot of people online who were concerned about similar issues and had a lot of conversations with people about accessibility and supports for people with disabilities.

compelling story of how one participant became a central voice in several challenging policy conversations, which included revisiting racist zoning laws and working on an anti-racism committee to elevate the voices of non-White citizens in their area, citizens who often faced large obstacles to participation within the community's infrastructure. These examples of policy and social change-based motivations demonstrate how critical it is to have diverse voices represented and amplified at decision-making tables, not just within the realm of equity and inclusion, but in spaces where policies related to public infrastructure and municipal resources are implemented.

Of those potential candidates who decided not to run, most mentioned a lack of belief that their efforts would be rewarded with the impact they would like to see.

Place-Based Motivations

Municipal Politics is Close to Home
Many participants noted the power of municipal politics to have a profound impact on their local neighborhoods in very direct, tangible and meaningful ways. They viewed this level of government as a place to create almost immediate impacts for their local communities. In many cases, our participants had been involved in local volunteer opportunities that further connected them to the community's needs. A previous study from 2014 about diverse representation in Toronto and Vancouver also observed the importance of community connections in potential candidates' decision to run for office. Evolving from values-based community engagement, some candidates' decision to run for office was a reaction to a suggestion from an individual, but for others it evolved naturally out of their community engagement activities.[12]

Online Communities Within Municipalities
Some participants' municipal politics journey began in online forums and virtual communities where citizens would discuss their municipality's issues and explore possible interventions together. For some, those online communities provided a platform to learn about the residents of their community and became a source of social support from which to launch their campaigns. For potential candidates with mobility constraints, online forums also provided a doorway into community-based political discourse where in-person events could be hard to access.[13]

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[12] Maharaj, Skylar. 2014. "Exploring Diversity of Representation in Toronto and Vancouver : Political Voices". Toronto Metropolitan University. https://doi.org/10.32920/ryerson.14663094.v1.

[13] There has been an emergence of online Formations Advocating for Inclusion and Representation in Politics. In 2018 #MyVotecounts, an online campaign that began in Ontario called for greater participation and representation for people with disabilities to have their voices heard in politics, and provides insights into the aspirations and desires from the disability community in Ontario on how they hope to be included and involved in Ontario politics.

Rural & Northern Ontario

There appear to be motivations unique to specific rural and northern regions of Ontario, but further study is needed to better understand some of our early observations. For example, some of the diverse candidates we spoke to who chose to run in rural and northern communities were particularly motivated by the lack of representation of diverse people not only within their municipal government, but within the community overall. The survey revealed that strong motivations are needed to face and overcome the unique challenges of electoral politics in rural, remote and Northern communities.[14] With unique challenges within the physical and social infrastructure of rural, remote and Northern communities, potential candidates rely on their existing personal assets (community profile, knowledge and skills, employment flexibility) to overcome barriers related to lack of mentorship, trouble recruiting volunteers, raising campaign funds and personal campaign financing (Read more in Common Barriers).

Opportunities for Further Study
To explore similarities and differences, future research opportunities include an in-depth study looking at the self-reported motivations of diverse candidates against the self-reported motivations of candidates who do not belong to equity-deserving groups.

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[14] See Appendix A. Key Takeaways from Survey Results

Common Enablers & Assets

The research surfaced a number of common enablers and assets that move diverse candidates, starting with the decision to run for municipal office, through to launching a campaign and navigating their time in office. These factors had a significant impact on our research participants' decision to run, and the feasibility and viability of their campaigns. It should be noted that many of these enablers and assets would be common for non-diverse candidates as well, and throughout the following section, we go deeper into these aspects and illustrate how they look for diverse candidates.

Personal Skills and Capabilities

For many participants, aspects of their personality, lived experiences and professional backgrounds supported them through their campaigns and roles in municipal office. A common archetype of a political candidate describes someone who is a people person, a strong communicator, relationship-oriented, extroverted, a bridge builder and an articulate public speaker.[15] Many participants affirmed that these qualities were true, but nuancing them for diverse candidates. For example, some reflected that due to their previous experiences of loss and hardship, they had developed a deep sense of resilience that helped them navigate the negativity, bullying and harassment on the campaign trail. Another participant noted that their centrist philosophy helped them bring together several different worldviews within their municipal community and municipal governing team. One participant noted how their multiracial identity reached across several groups, making them relatable to many different types of people. Overall, participants' strong oration skills came from many different aspects of their lives across their childhoods and adult life, including churches, youth groups, sports teams, Toastmasters, TV hosting, community organizing and campaign schools.

Other professional skills supported candidates in more procedural and technical ways. For example, procedural training for political discourse from internships and shadowing opportunities, focused training in facilitating cross-cultural communication and community discourse, marketing training to develop strong communication strategies and outreach materials, and training as a lawyer toward mastery of policy and legislation.

Rooting in Strong Community, Identity and/or Professional Groups

Participants' personal, cultural, faith-based, and professional communities helped them to build community recognition and served as a base of support for their political campaigns, especially within very close and tight-knit communities. In the survey, 73% of respondents shared that their existing profile in their community was an asset both in running for office

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[15] Many participants also acknowledged that we need a more pluralistic view of personality archetypes for successful political candidates. At the moment, the most socialized mental model of a candidate embodies the characteristics listed above.

and winning their campaign. These deep community connections supported their campaigns in a variety of ways. Tactically, they were a source of much needed volunteers and voters. Strategically, they built candidates' civic literacy. Emotionally, they provided participants with much needed social support during difficult moments while campaigning and in office.

Participants' community involvement came in many shapes and sizes. Some participants developed their base through local businesses and unions, building support from within enterprise, labour and industry-oriented professional communities. Others were anchored in online community spaces, either as participants in interactive forums, or as authors and hosts for local media outlets. Church membership was commonly cited as a socially, emotionally and spiritually important foundation. Certain professional communities like campaign schools serve as a feeder system into political careers. However, many diverse candidates face financial barriers to accessing these programs (see Common Barriers).

> *"If you are a tight demographic community or ward you may be able to get people from your church or Mosque to support you. If you have the advantage of being from a tight ethnic demographic you might be able to mimic the support of a political party."*
> *-Focus Group 1-*

For some, professional experiences in the nonprofit sector, for example at social service organizations, strengthened their base of support. Some participants even founded their own nonprofit organizations: one supporting queer community members to pursue political careers and another helping municipalities strengthen their Black History Month programs.

Having ideological or identity-based support was core to many folks' wellbeing and focus during their campaigns. One participant found a strong sense of community from a support group with other like-minded candidates who also experienced harassment from other candidates. In the groups that were specifically focused on networking with other racialized candidates, participants shared that it fostered a sense of belonging and community, helped them focus on their respective campaigns and was a critical source of support when members had experiences with harassment.

Some participants discussed their involvement in grassroots organizing around civic engagement and political literacy training within a wide array of organizations representing faith based communities and equity-deserving groups. These experiences served as enablers for participants to work alongside folks with similar lived experiences who shared political aspirations, while having a testing ground to explore what engagement with local democracy looks like. Participants also noted their participation in larger

movements advancing democratic participation. The movements served as communities of practice and often resulted in mentorship from professionals in political spaces (such as Chiefs of Staff). Community organizations, volunteering, campaign schools, academic placements and practicums, and social movements gave them a window to the world of politics and developed their capacity to be leaders within the political system.

Advocates, Mentors, and Cheerleaders within the System

Mentorship and advisory relationships with experienced individuals was commonly cited as a key enabler for diverse candidates on their pathway into municipal office. In cases where potential candidates had access to political mentorship, it provided them the confidence, access and the platform they needed to step into a campaign. In the absence of it (see Common Barriers), some participants found themselves overwhelmed and demoralized, not knowing who to ask even basic questions about campaigning and administration.

Examples of mentorship relationships included: opportunities to attend committee meetings, and one-on-one relationships with current and former councillors. This support from within the political system, across many of the participants' experiences, was a critical source of encouragement and motivation, engendering confidence that success was possible. As an example, one participant shared that they established a relationship with their local councillor to discuss issues and concerns, and when that councillor retired, it was the same councillor who encouraged this participant to run for their seat. In many ways, mentorships become a process of informal and/or formal recruitment.[16]

> *"We should leverage mentors who can explain how city hall works and how decisions get made." -*
> *Focus Group 1-*

Another participant was mentored by a prominent politician who encouraged them to run, "as diverse groups were grossly underrepresented." A few participants shared that some of the greatest encouragement came from mentorship from current diverse councillors and candidates, encouraging them to be part of increasing representation and "instilling a sense of duty." In some cases, these extended political mentorship networks (at local, regional, provincial and federal levels) resulted in more tangible supports, including access to voter lists and other tactical resources to facilitate an easier first campaign, but also providing

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[16] **Proximity to Privilege (Recruitment Theory):** Research on recruitment has revealed the important role of recruiters and the impact they have on electoral outcomes, and how those who are recruited or asked to run for office are the ones who emerge as candidates (Lawless, Fox, and Feeley, 2001). In addition, recruitment activates the individual predispositions that make someone more likely to seek office. Thus recruiters yield considerable power over who is admitted into the political sphere. Fox, L., Lawless, J. & Feeley, C. (2001). Gender and the Decision to Run for Office. Legislative Studies Quarterly, 26(3), 411-435.

them a window to attend committee meetings and get a sense of how the municipal system worked firsthand.

One participant expressed the cyclical nature of a lack of representation in municipal politics and how it results in an absence of role models and mentors.[17] With fewer role models currently in office, diverse candidates can need more encouragement to run.[18] [19] [20] When mentorship *is* available, it can lead to a transformative experience for diverse candidates, as it gives them access points to information, resources, and offers a space for reflection and knowledge exchange.

In one of our focus groups, we learned that many participants had political aspirations in their youth that led to a broad range of volunteer experiences in campaigns and within councillor offices. This provided them with insights into the world of municipal politics and provided them the opportunity to make meaningful connections with political candidates and elected officials. We heard: "from wanting to become a candidate to becoming a candidate, you need the right conditions (expanded below in section **Right Time, Right Place)**, a team, and systems in place, and you start building out those systems at a young age."

While some participants shared that they found mentorship in folks who had experience directly in the political system, who helped them see their potential as a candidate, others talked about accessing mentorship through more formalized capacity building programs and campaign schools, including those for specific identity-based groups. Many participants cited that some of the most successful training programs they engaged with were when they were youth, and how those opportunities helped create the critical path to success in municipal politics. We heard of one experience where they were part of the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council, and throughout their high school years, they had monthly meetings with the mayor and convened monthly meetings with high school representatives across schools in their community, learning about youth issues and concerns. They also had the opportunity to be a part of different advisory committees and meetings with the Mayor.

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[17] See Appendix B. Focus Group 1: Organizations Serving Diverse Candidates & Experienced Individuals

[18] Our initial desk research revealed how it was crucial to provide women with consistent and ongoing encouragement to run for office, and highlighted the critical role of mentorship opportunities that would help provide them with the support needed to help them decide to run for office. Pettie, Jasmine. (2019). "Lagging Behind" An Examination of Why Women Continue to be So Underrepresented in Canadian Federal Politics." Master Thesis. Carleton University. Retrieved from https://repository.library.carleton.ca/concern/research_works/3n204015x

[19] Studies on gender and the decision to run for office revealed how there is a direct link between recruitment and electoral outcomes, and how women were less likely than men to have someone suggest that they run. Fox, L., Lawless, J. & Feeley, C. (2001). "Gender and the Decision to Run for Office". Legislative Studies Quarterly, 26(3), 411-435.

[20] Research has revealed that at the federal level, when women and minorities run, they win, and what this means is that if parties nominated more diverse candidates the result would likely be more diversity in Parliament. Grounded in research that shows women candidates need far more encouragement to run for office than men do, the federal Liberals launched #AskHer, inviting Canadians to identify qualified women candidates from submitted names.Tolley, E. (2019). "Want more diversity in politics? Start by looking at political parties". In *Hill Times*. Retrieved from: https://www.hilltimes.com/story/2019/06/19/want-more-diversity-in-politics-start-by-looking-at-political-parties/265892/

Exposure to and positive experiences of the municipal system at a young age have a profound impact on whether or not a diverse candidate will see themselves as a viable candidate as an adult. This interviewee, a racialized and queer candidate within their riding, shared that regular interactions with the mayor played a large part in motivating their political career.

1] Elementary School: Career Day Guest Speaker, who was the current mayor, inspired them to become the future mayor of their community.

2] High School: Part of the mayor's youth advisory council. Throughout high school years, they had monthly meetings with the mayor and convened monthly meetings with high school representatives across schools in their community, learning about youth issues and concerns. They also had the opportunity to be a part of different advisory committees and meetings with the mayor.

3] First Campaign: At the age of 18, ran for school board trustee and learned about the challenges of incumbency.

4] Second Campaign: Ran for school board trustee. They thought they would win and were disappointed at result. Decided to shift to council.

5] Campaign School: Joined a campaign school and received mentorship from a prominent politician. Also met many eager young people who were interested in running for municipal office.

6] Third Campaign: First time running for councillor and lost.

7] Identity Questioned: Had an emotional dip when concerns came up about their sexuality and whether it presented a barrier to their aspirations for a political life.

8] Network Strength: Connected with 2SLGBTQ+ activists in the US, was inspired by all the queer political activists and groups in the States.

9] Positive Campaign: Garnered support from donors, community members, and had a positive experience with the campaign overall.

10] Queer Advocacy & Mentorship Program: Creates a queer advocacy and mentorship program and sees a member of it get elected and become a federal minister.

11] Fourth Campaign: At a different stage in their career and was also a caregiver. Their opponent in this election was a former MPP and was a known politician for the community. For this reason, knew this was not the right time to run, but still proceeded and lost.

12] Break: Decided to take a break from running for election.

Beyond youth programs, placement programs emerging from these initiatives, many talked about how signing up for campaign schools provided a pathway to both meeting peers as well as receiving direct mentorship from politicians.

Whatever form the mentorship took, direct relationships that facilitated encouragement, confidence and direct support was a significant factor in diverse candidates deciding to seek office, but also being successful when elected.
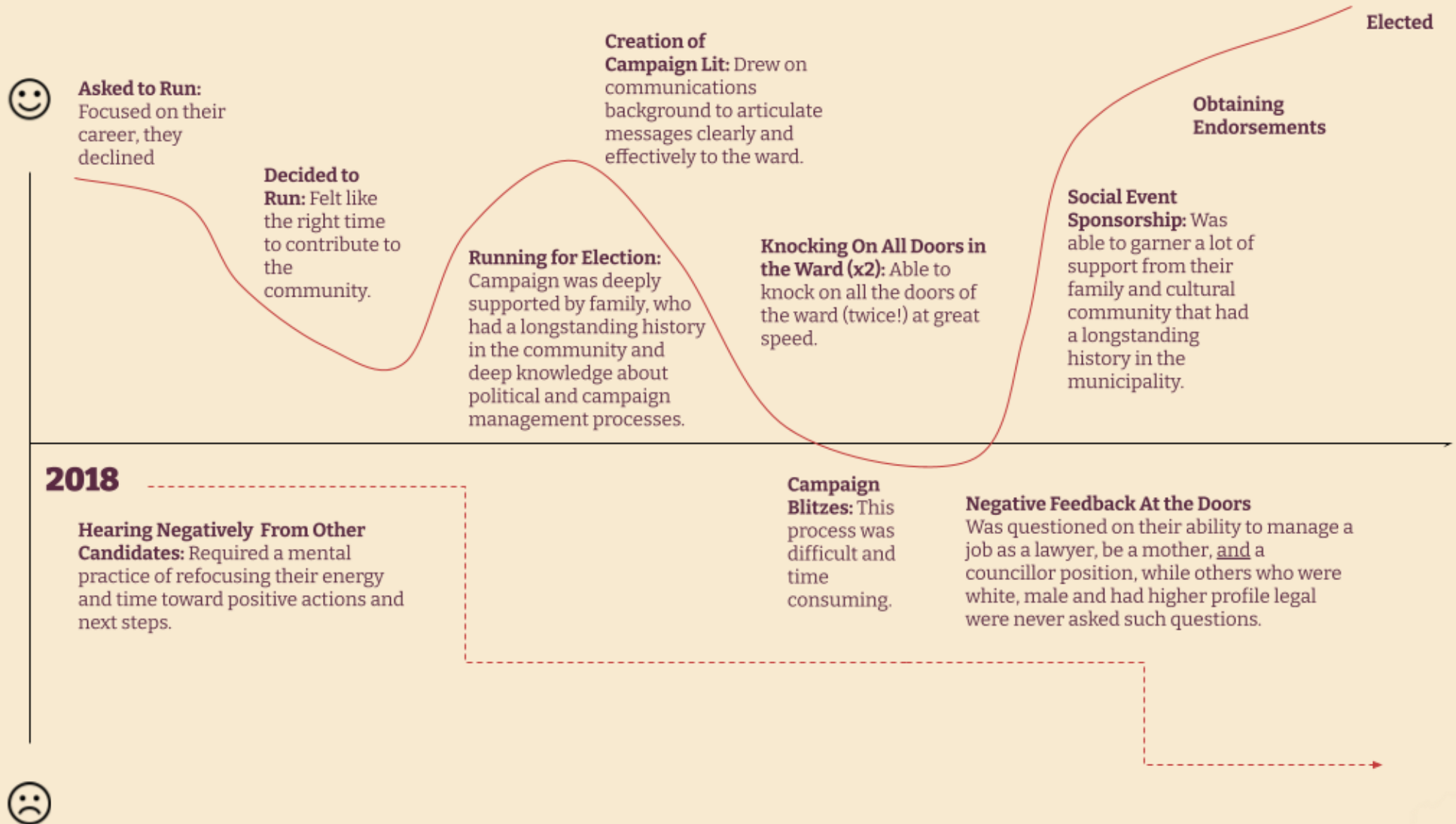
Family, Friend & Community Support

Almost all candidates - regardless of if they won or lost their campaign - talked about the significant investments made by their friends, family and acquaintances, who would donate their time and skills to their campaign. Many found that they drew on a core team of long-standing friendships as part of their broader community support throughout the process of campaigning, assembling groups of volunteers who would help to build campaign websites, outreach materials, go door-to-door, and support with childcare. We learned that campaigning is often a family affair, with children, partners, parents, aunties and cousins all playing a role to help candidates manage busy schedules of door-knocking and campaigning events on top of family responsibilities and full time jobs.

Beyond more tactical and strategic roles, many participants talked about the emotional support provided by partners, siblings and children, some choosing to stay home on election night to watch the results in the quiet container of their home environment. In one case a racialized, female participant shared that her husband and campaign manager would accompany her on the campaign trail, providing emotional support and personal safety in areas of her rural community where she felt poorly received.

One participant trained up a strong group of volunteers, who became an extension of them on the campaign trail. This candidate coached their volunteer team to effectively engage residents in their community during door-to-door visits, sharing information about their platform, answering questions and logging follow-up conversations in their notebooks. The candidate would then make phone calls to community members based on their volunteer's notes and logs.

In a few cases, some shared that a family history of political engagement and political leadership, in one case, leadership in the local Indigenous community and/or having an extended family with deep roots in the city, accelerated their ability to see themselves as a candidate. It alleviated some of the emotional and intellectual labour required in understanding how to build and run campaigns, allowing these candidates to work from a template, access people with experience, and focus on being present as a candidate.

Having family and friends who are knowledgeable about the process of campaigning makes a tremendous difference in assessing the viability of your candidacy and developing your campaign strategy. This racialized, female candidate ran and won (but did not seek re-election). She shared that her positive campaigning experience was largely rooted in a deep knowledge base about the political system and campaign management processes.

Elected

Asked to Run: Focused on their career, they declined

Creation of Campaign Lit: Drew on communications background to articulate messages clearly and effectively to the ward.

Obtaining Endorsements

Decided to Run: Felt like the right time to contribute to the community.

Running for Election: Campaign was deeply supported by family, who had a longstanding history in the community and deep knowledge about political and campaign management processes.

Knocking On All Doors in the Ward (x2): Able to knock on all the doors of the ward (twice!) at great speed.

Social Event Sponsorship: Was able to garner a lot of support from their family and cultural community that had a longstanding history in the municipality.

2018

Hearing Negatively From Other Candidates: Required a mental practice of refocusing their energy and time toward positive actions and next steps.

Campaign Blitzes: This process was difficult and time consuming.

Negative Feedback At the Doors Was questioned on their ability to manage a job as a lawyer, be a mother, and a councillor position, while others who were white, male and had higher profile legal were never asked such questions.

Participants did acknowledge that drawing from family and personal support networks can have limitations when campaigning, and that supports like campaign firms[21] that "make calls for you and hire staff, [as] you can only get so much family support"[22] can be invaluable assets to your campaign success, *if* you can afford it (see Common Barriers).

Right Time, Right Place

There appears to be a delicate balance and calculus that potential candidates explore between knowing when *they* are personally ready to be a candidate, and getting an understanding of if their *community* is ready to receive a candidate of their specific background/identity.

Internal Timing: I'm Ready
Many participants shared about their own personal development and preparation toward being ready to run. To arrive at the decision that "I'm ready," participants needed to feel that they had learned enough about their communities' needs and that their family and career could withstand the stresses of a campaign. Furthermore, many participants needed to feel they had gathered enough information, resources, and advice about the mechanics of running and holding municipal office to feel confident moving forward into a campaigning process. For some, the feeling of being ready came from a very specific moment or interaction with a mentor or community member, signalling the need for their leadership and visibility in the municipal political landscape.
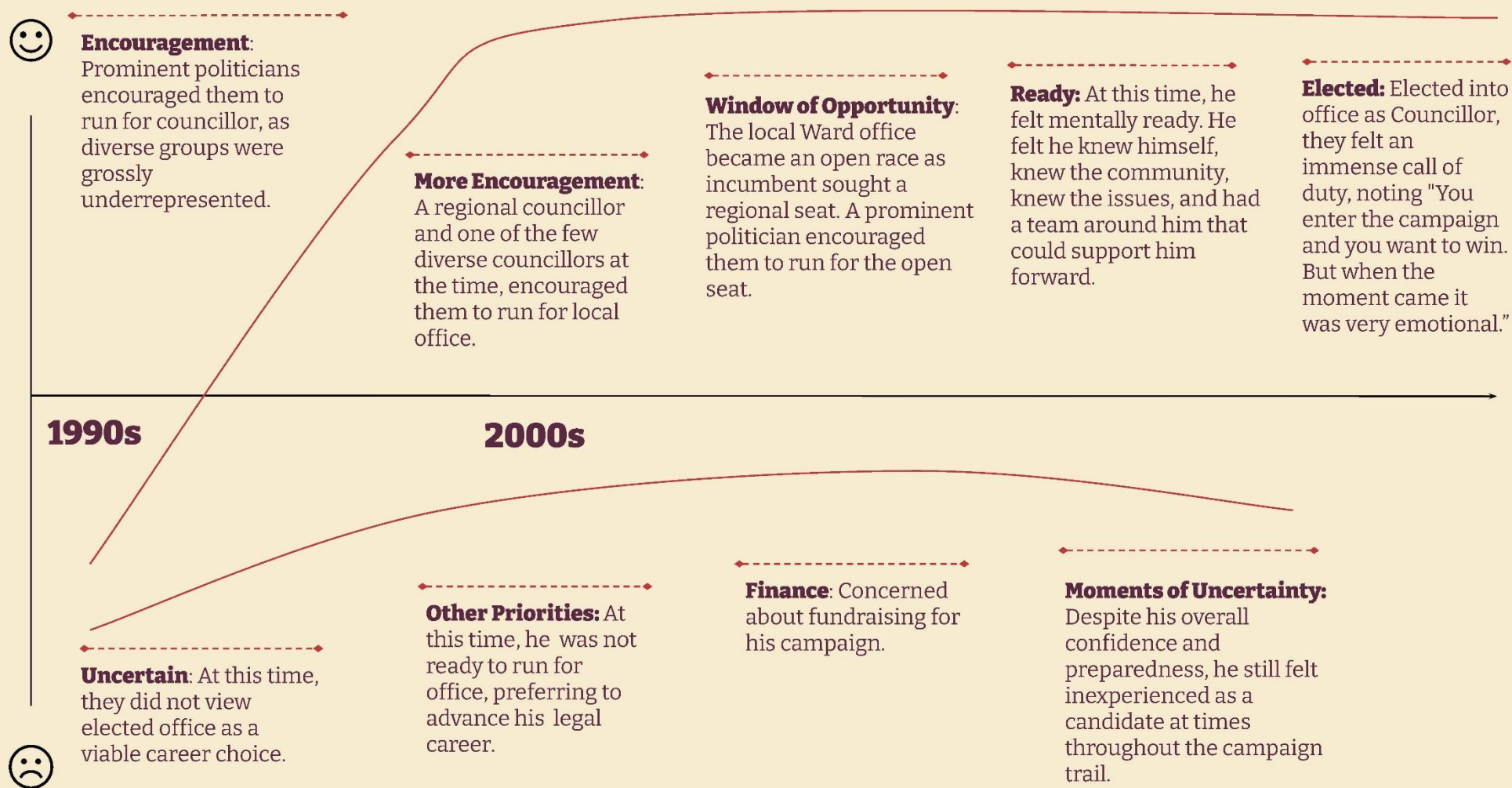
External Timing: They're Ready for Me
Externally, most participants wanted to feel that their community was ready to receive *them*. This included signals from their mentorship networks that they would be supported along the way and indications from their community networks that they would turn out to vote in a hypothetical campaign. In Focus Group 2, with potential candidates, participants expressed that they would consider running for office if certain conditions were in place to guarantee a positive experience. This includes having a team of like-minded candidates either in office or running for office as part of a team slate. One participant in the focus group shared that they would consider running if they knew that "the campaign would be competitive and not just a token."

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[21] Campaign firms as defined by participants are organizations that offer services that include: outreach and engagement activities, planning for door knocking, and making calls within the community.
[22] See Appendix B. Focus Group 1: Organizations Serving Diverse Candidates & Experienced Individuals

This interview participant, the first non-white councillor to be elected in their community, had been encouraged to run for office for some time, but remained uncertain. A window of opportunity activated their candidacy when an incumbent was departing, and the candidate felt mentally ready.

Encouragement: Prominent politicians encouraged them to run for councillor, as diverse groups were grossly underrepresented.

More Encouragement: A regional councillor and one of the few diverse councillors at the time, encouraged them to run for local office.

Window of Opportunity: The local Ward office became an open race as incumbent sought a regional seat. A prominent politician encouraged them to run for the open seat.

Ready: At this time, he felt mentally ready. He felt he knew himself, knew the community, knew the issues, and had a team around him that could support him forward.

Elected: Elected into office as Councillor, they felt an immense call of duty, noting "You enter the campaign and you want to win. But when the moment came it was very emotional."

1990s

2000s

Uncertain: At this time, they did not view elected office as a viable career choice.

Other Priorities: At this time, he was not ready to run for office, preferring to advance his legal career.

Finance: Concerned about fundraising for his campaign.

Moments of Uncertainty: Despite his overall confidence and preparedness, he still felt inexperienced as a candidate at times throughout the campaign trail.

Proof of Concept

A final asset worth highlighting is the opportunity to build a proof of concept of good works within your community ahead of running a campaign. Often through appointments, a candidate is more likely to run a successful campaign if they have already demonstrated their aptitude for the job and ability to get things done ahead of an election cycle. For example, one participant had a relatively short term as an appointed councillor for approximately 10 months ahead of their first campaign. During this time, they were extremely active in the community, organizing school supply drives, connecting with various community organizations and supporting the retirement community. They noted that this proof of concept gave them a strong position moving into their first election cycle.

Personal Financing

Financial capital in an election environment can be defined as the total money available to a candidate to fund the full scope of their campaigning activities. Campaigning can be costly, including the production of multimedia materials, online communications, media features, signs, mailers and merchandise. Many interviewees noted that - in the absence of support from a political party or donors - they were able to finance their campaign entirely through their personal finances. This is only possible at a certain threshold of financial stability and income level.

Common Barriers

The following chapter explores common barriers experienced by diverse candidates as they prepare to run, run for office, and assume municipal office. Some barriers articulated by the research participants - like the challenge of running against an incumbent - are issues that are likely faced by any candidate running for office, even those who do not belong to an equity-deserving group. Other barriers - like discrimination on the campaign trail and/or concerns for personal safety while canvassing in certain neighbourhoods - are unique to the experience of diverse Canadians. In many cases, it appears that generalized barriers commonly experienced by all candidates are often compounded by additional systemic challenges for diverse candidates. We have listed the following barriers in order from what *appears* to be the most common barriers for all potential candidates (regardless of identity), to the most unique barriers for diverse candidates.

Timing

Timing is a critical factor to success in politics, and the incumbent advantage is tremendous. Some of our research participants chose to run against an incumbent, while others ran or were appointed when an incumbent stepped down. As Professor Erin Tolley of Carleton University notes, incumbency creates a massive disadvantage for candidates, particularly diverse candidates, citing the case study of Mississauga's municipal council elections in 2018. Mississauga is a municipality where 57% of the population are a visible minority, but in that election only one racialized candidate was elected. In an election where "just two sitting councillors opted not to run for re-election [...] (all) of the incumbents who did run were re-elected, some garnering more than 90 percent of the vote."[23] As one interviewee stated the ""incumbent advantage is absolutely staggering" noting many times incumbents also bring the backing of political parties.

Many of interviewees noted that their initial success came from running after an incumbent stepped down or when they ran in ridings where two councillors could serve an area, allowing for more open competition for the second seat (in the case of the individual we interviewed the incumbent was comfortably re-elected). Other interviewees spoke about darker sides of incumbency, such as the fear of retaliation from an incumbent and their supporters. One participant spoke about the dedicated campaign an incumbent in their Ward carried out to mobilize their supporters to slander them online and vandalize their signs. Others spoke about the difficulty of raising funds when running against an established incumbent, with voters fearing their names would be revealed to the incumbent after the campaign in audited statements, being punished, or shut out of political influence in their ward post-election.

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[23] Tolley, E. (2018). "Lack of council diversity puts municipalities at risk". In Policy Options. Retrieved from https://policyoptions.irpp.org/fr/magazines/october-2018/lack-of-council-diversity-puts-municipalities-at-risk/

Another commonly cited barrier was around the timing of a campaign related to other family and career commitments. Running a campaign (and performing within a municipal governance office) is often done *in addition* to working an existing full-time job and family responsibilities. Many participants noted that they had considered running for office long before their actual campaigns, but felt that either their professional careers or family lives needed to take priority. Many noted that they wanted to run for office after their children were older, both to protect their children from political exposure and to ensure they had enough time in their schedules for caretaking and parenting. Other candidates had caretaking responsibilities of elder family members that posed a similar challenge and conflict when considering the prospect of running.

One candidate who ran multiple times noted the challenges they faced during a particular campaign when they had to assume a caregiver role for their extended family. Despite deep networks they had both locally and nationally to pull on, the time needed for their family commitments led to a deeply disappointing election loss. Another candidate who was a single care-giver noted the only way they were able to carry out door-knocking or attending events was to bring their child with them, placing real limits on their ability to be present for face-to-face interactions. One candidate mentioned that campaigning meant there was virtually no time left for them to engage with their family, putting a huge strain on their relationships at home. This sentiment was shared by other individuals who talked about the incredible challenge faced by candidates when they had to balance family commitments, work and campaigning for office. Furthermore, a campaign involves becoming a public figure, which can have distinct repercussions for family members. One participant shared how someone put a bullet through one of their signs, and said: "What if I had a daughter at that time who saw her father's face with a bullet hole? What would that do to a young child? If I'm putting my family out there, it might not be worth it, maybe someone else should take this on that doesn't have these barriers or risks."

Financial Barriers

Financial barriers were by far the most widely cited barriers for candidates. In our survey, for candidates who had run and won office, financial barriers were named as their largest barrier to overcome. This includes the personal financial impact of running for office (27%) and the reality that the salary for their elected office was not financially viable (24%). In our focus group with stakeholders who support diverse candidates, virtually all participants shared how challenging municipal elections can be without access to sufficient funds to manage a campaign. In the interviews, participants often shared in-depth stories about these costs, most of whom financed their campaigns through their own personal finances. The item list of costs to campaign included: designing a website, designing and printing handouts, campaign signs, child care, food for volunteers, t-shirts and other merchandise for the campaign team, surrendered income from not working, hiring staff (i.e. campaign

managers) and hiring a campaign firm. Many participants noted that "support from family and friends can only get you so far in a campaign." Another participant who had run unsuccessfully for office multiple times shared that they didn't "have any problems that couldn't be solved by a large amount of money or a campaign bus." This concern was echoed in our focus group with potential candidates, with many saying they worried about having the depth of social networks to elicit appropriate levels of financing or that the case for campaign funding would require them to sacrifice their principals in order to garner enough donations. Many individuals cited the cost of signs as a specific barrier, with one interviewee noting they were unsure how else they could build name recognition without making a large investment on signs, even if this created massive financial pressures.

Identity could also compound these issues for diverse candidates. One interviewee described the financial challenges they faced as a single parent and the guilt they felt about 'burdening others' by asking them for financial support. Many diverse candidates also come from communities that are economically disadvantaged. One participant noted that poverty rates in the transgender community make it almost impossible for many transgendered people to consider running. In 2023, Statistics Canada reported that racialized graduates generally have lower employment income than non-racialized, non-Indigenous graduates. For people two years after completing their bachelor's degree, employment income averaged $45,700 per year for racialized women and $47,800 for non-racialized and non-Indigenous women, compared with $51,600 for racialized men and $54,100 for non-racialized and non-Indigenous men.[24] Furthermore, in Ontario in 2020, the poverty rates in 2023 were 10.7% for South Asian, 12.4% for Black, 14.6% for Chinese, 17.9% for Arab and 16.4% for West Asian communities, compared to a poverty rate of 6.3% for non-racialized groups.[25]

Besco and Tolley's research reports that donation levels from racialized communities tend to be lower on average than those from non-racialized communities (with the exception of South Asian communities), compounding the financial challenges faced by those candidates who might expect to turn to their own ethno-cultural community as source of major campaign support.[26] Existing campaign finance laws that reduce the ability of a candidate to rely on a small pool of donors do not make things less daunting, as many diverse candidates find the challenges of building a broad coalition of donors insurmountable.

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[24] Statistics Canada. Racialized graduates generally have lower employment incomes than non-racialized, non-Indigenous graduates. Retrieved from https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230118/dq230118b-eng.htm

[25] Statistics Canada. Individual Market Basket Measure poverty status by visible minority groups and demographic characteristics: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810011501&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.56&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.1&pickMembers%5B2%5D=3.1&pickMembers%5B3%5D=4.1&pickMembers%5B4%5D=5.1

[26] Besco, Randy, and Erin Tolley. 2022. "Ethnic Group Differences in Donations to Electoral Candidates." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 48 (5): 1072–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1804339.

Even established professionals with steady full-time jobs noted the burden of financing their campaigns. Campaign costs included designing and promoting a website, creating and printing communication materials, ordering signs, and coordinating online promotions. The expenses really add up, especially for folks who are using personal finances to fund their campaign.

All Candidates Meeting: Talked to some people beforehand to help prepare for the All Candidates Meeting. Despite feeling a bit apprehensive, it was a positive experience.

New Friendships: Made great connections and built friendships along the campaign trail. Still friends with some of the other candidates.

Financing the Campaign: The financial burden of campaigning and the lack of funding was a big barrier. This including the cost of campaign materials like signs to put up in the community and online promotions. Wasn't sure how else to develop name recognition in the community.

Safety & Belonging on the Campaign Trail: Didn't feel comfortable campaigning in rural areas alone as a racialized woman. There was a lot of geographic area to cover, which felt overwhelming.

Election Results: Despite the overall satisfactory experience, disappointed with results and outcome of election. Though didn't enter public office, felt as if she won because of her sense of accomplishment in running a strong campaign.

In their second campaign, this same candidate hired a campaign manager, noted as a great investment for their campaign strategy and personal experience. While the campaign manager brought in more donations, the campaign turned out to be more expensive than the first.

Campaign Manager: Having a campaign manager made experience so much more enjoyable. The campaign manager's expertise made them feel more confident.

All Candidates Meeting: With past experience and a stronger team in place, felt much more prepared for this campaign's All Candidates Meeting.

Social Connections: Had a strong social support network which made it easier to focus on the campaign. Developed friendships with other racialized candidates which instilled a sense of belonging and commarodary.

Financing: The campaign manager helped to get more donations, but this campaign was more expensive, and a large chunk of financing came out-of-pocket.

Safety & Belonging on the Campaign Trail: Experiences of disrespect and disregard in certain areas of the community. Someone threw their campaign signs in the garbage. Certain community members' demeanor would visibly change.

Results: The result and outcome of election was hugely disappointing, as she believed she outworked the competition. Had the most signs, knocked on the most doors, but a large group of her supporters didn't follow through with voting on election day.

Many candidates may need to take a leave of absence from employment to campaign and - in smaller municipalities - they may end up in a part-time or lower-paying role once in office. Clearly, the financial implications of running for office must be addressed if we seek to increase representation in our municipal elections.

Access to Social Capital: Donors, Volunteers, Mentors, Exemplars & Training

Social capital is defined as the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively.[27] In a campaigning environment, social capital includes access to networked individuals, mentors and gatekeepers who can open doors into the municipal political realm, reputational standing within the community in which you are running, access to volunteers who can help you run your campaign, membership in professional networks and labour unions to anchor your voting base, and - generally - support from a broad base of citizens who will drive people to the voting booths on your behalf.

As mentioned above, candidates may not have sufficient social networks to garner the required funds to run a successful campaign. But, social capital barriers can take on multiple forms. An ability to recruit volunteers is a critical asset for any politician in running a campaign, as outlined in our previous section. Within our survey, for respondents who ran and lost their campaign, challenges in recruiting volunteers was named as the top barrier (50%). Many of our interviewees spoke about challenges around finding volunteers, specifically for those who were politically inclined but were (a) relative newcomers within the communities they wished to assume office or (b) running in communities where they lacked large numbers of citizens who shared their ethno-cultural background. Our survey data reinforced how this issue plays out for diverse candidates, as barriers around recruiting volunteers were reported at higher levels for respondents who were from equity-deserving groups. One insight that is worth further exploration is around how geography impacts the challenges of finding volunteers. In our survey data, recruiting volunteers and finding mentors came up as the most pronounced barrier for individuals in rural, remote, and Northern communities, along with fundraising, and candidates stressed how important community profile, community knowledge, and employment flexibility were to overcoming these barriers.
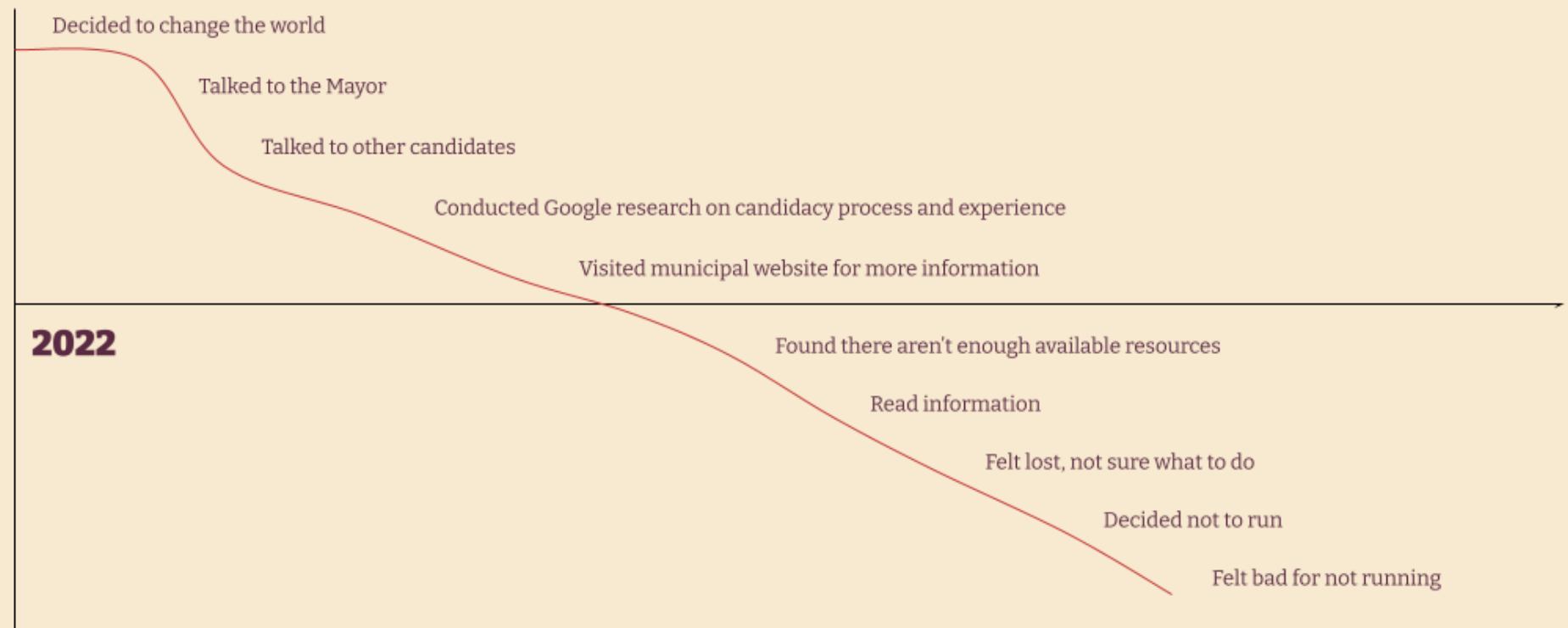
Our research participants also describe the barriers to accessing mentors and role models for diverse candidates. Participants highlighted their challenges (1) locating enough resources and information to prepare for a campaign without access to gatekeepers and

[27] Hellerstein, J.K. & Neumark, D. (2020). *IZA DP No. 13413: Social Capital, Networks, and Economic Wellbeing*. Retrieved from https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/13413/social-capital-networks-and-economic-wellbeing#:~:text=One%20definition%20of%20social%20capital,that%20society%20to%20function%20effectively%22

insiders, (2) navigating the campaign trail as a diverse candidate when there are few success cases and exemplars from your identity group and (3) navigating the day-to-day realities of municipal government with few mentors and allies that share your background, often being tokenized, or feeling you have to represent the lived experiences of whole communities of people from various racialized, religions, and abilities groups. When you simply can't see anyone on your local municipal council who looks like you, the pathway into office is less clear. As one respondent mentioned, there are "no trans[gender] women anywhere in any position of authority" in Canada, meaning (a) Canadian voters lack examples of what a transgender women in a leadership role might look like (allowing the fear of the unknown to become a block to embracing transgender candidates) and (b) potential transgender candidates lack role models (which makes winning seem feel less possible).

Mentorship and social capital are related to notable information and training gaps that several research participants described, including (a) not knowing who to ask exploratory questions about the nature of various municipal and electoral processes, (b) not having access to self-learning resources describing how to run a successful campaign, and (c) not having the social connections or financial ability to enter campaign schools, where potential candidates are trained with the necessary information and skills to run a successful campaign.

Not having enough information was a common reason for deciding not to run. This potential candidate - a mid-career professional identifying as male and Black in a mid-size jurisdiction - found that his lack of knowledge about (a) the requirements of a campaign, and (b) the role of councillor itself, was a significant barrier. He shared that not only was it frustrating not to easily find that information online, but that he wasn't sure who (or how) to ask thee seemingly basic questions.

☺

Decided to change the world

Talked to the Mayor

Talked to other candidates

Conducted Google research on candidacy process and experience

Visited municipal website for more information

2022

Found there aren't enough available resources

Read information

Felt lost, not sure what to do

Decided not to run

Felt bad for not running

☹

The Mental Health Toll of Discrimination, Bullying, & Harassment

Political polarization and toxic discourse has become an increasingly salient issue in Ontario (as shared in the Context section), disproportionately impacting diverse candidates. In our survey, the majority of respondents who were (a) not from equity-deserving groups, (b) had won office and (c) decided not to run again, did not mention the impact of toxic politics, harassment, and political vitriol in their rationale for leaving politics. The reflections these politicians offered centered more around tenure (people feeling they had served long enough) and the nature of the job.[28] Alternatively, in our qualitative work with diverse candidates (interviews and focus groups), the issues of harassment, discrimination, and online toxicity appeared front and center. While all candidates may experience some amount of bullying and harassment along their political journey, it appears that issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and ability significantly amplify the volume and intensity.

During our focus group with potential candidates, one racialized participant shared how they "don't want to be seen or be in the arena for certain issues" due to the undue attention this would bring online. They also noted that in this new digital era "the stakes are so much higher than ever before and it's so easy for everything to fall apart if you are in a playing field because of the negative impact of alt-right and White supremacist movements."[29] One participant noted that they are approached by at least 30 individuals from their community about running almost every election cycle, but their fear for personal safety as a racialized woman running in today's environment is the major barrier preventing them from moving forward. Many participants expressed that the vitriol politicians currently face simply makes running for office not seem worth it.

Issues of discrimination, bullying, and harassment both in-person and in online spaces were reflected by the lived experiences of research participants who had previously run for office, and were reaffirmed by organizations who regularly support diverse candidates. Candidates shared harrowing stories, including online trolls digging into their personal history to make attacks that referenced deceased family members, or spreading false and misleading stories about their positions and personal lives. One participant described her experience campaigning in a rural community as a racialized woman, where travelling to more remote locations to meet constituents oftentimes felt unsafe canvassing in remote areas due to the way in which residents would respond to her arriving at their doors. To overcome the challenge, she would be accompanied by members of her campaign team and family.

Several other racialized participants spoke about the bullying they faced in their community, and in cyberspace during their re-election campaigns. In an effort to support

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[28] See Appendix A. Key Takeaways from Survey Results
[29] See Appendix C. Key Takeaways from Focus Group 2: Potential Candidates

policies that would improve social services for equity-deserving community members, or policies that increase taxes to fund ongoing municipal programming for their community members, they described the experience of being broadly blamed for bringing these policies forward, or for increasing the amount of diverse communities present in the municipality. Individuals spoke of having to learn to navigate racist or discriminatory comments and changes in demeanor from community members while visiting residents door-to-door, during debates and other campaign activities. In some cases, individuals defaced their signs. Interviewees also mentioned ways in which community members and potential supporters would blatantly point out the disadvantage that came from their race, gender or sexual identity, making them question their own candidacy.

Individuals then spoke about the "burden of representation" when you are a political leader for an underrepresented group. Once in office, many participants described feelings of loneliness and exceptionalism from being the only member of municipal government from their identity group (for example, the only racialized member of council, the first non-White mayor, the first non-binary councillor, the first transgender woman councillor, and/or the first racialized woman on the school board). Being the only elected member of municipal government from their community, they felt a pressure to represent the voices from an entire diaspora, gender, sexual orientation and/or religion. It's a heavy burden to carry, especially without the needed support and comradery from other staffers and politicians from that equity-deserving community who could help to carry the burden together.

As one participant mentioned "any time a racialized candidate is in the public sphere you are seen to represent the Black community or South Asian community, or this big catch all group" and that we have to recognize that the "community is a community of multiple communities." One of the potential political leaders mentioned a deep anxiety about running for office where they would feel the pressure to not "bring shame or insecurity to a working class community" they represent.

Within an environment of strained support systems, some participants addressed the competitive nature of campaigns. When other racialized candidates were running they felt apprehension about running against them. Similarly, many participants we spoke to mentioned how seeing diverse candidates run and fail or gain office, face unfair media pressure and then burn out was a determinant, including one respondent who mentioned that after watching many of their community members run for office "the collective burnout of running emanates to me, even if I'm not running myself." These distinct barriers need to be fully appreciated and addressed if more diverse (particularly racialized) candidates will gain the confidence, support, and ongoing care to step into the political sphere as leaders and changemakers.

Win or lose, the impacts of being the first, or even "the only" are significant on diverse candidates. This interviewee - the first Black & Indigenous woman to hold office as Councillor and Mayor in the municipality - found that the enduring burden of unfair treatment, significant stress, and the struggle to balance their municipal job with their full time non-profit job was tenuous.

Encouragement: Working at a local services organization at the time, encouraged by colleagues and bureaucrats. They were motivated to bring more representation from Black & Indigenous communities to the local government.

Anticipation: Approaching election day, felt a mixture of excitement and nervousness. Managed through the political debates with tact and a strong strategy. Feeling they'd put their best foot forward, they waited for community members to place their votes.

Elected: Watched the election results at home with her daughters, and celebrated a win! Encouraged by the positive result, began to prepare.

Interim Mayor: Became interim mayor and felt a new wave of support, possibility, and momentum.

Decided to Run

Term 1

Term 2

Mixed Bag of Support and Discrimination: As they campaigned, they were welcomed with open arms and support by some community members, particularly Black and Indigenous community members. At the same time, faced anti-black/anti-Indigenous bias and discrimination from others individuals and local businesses. Learned to navigate discriminatory remarks from community members, both privately and publicly.

First Term: Murals representing diverse voices and stories at city hall served as a reminder everyday of their hard work and the positive changes that are possible. The stresses of the job and at times unfair treatment proved challenging, include being deterred from becoming interim mayor, despite it being the appropriate procedure at the time.

Second Term: While the desire to drive positive impact and support community development did not waiver, the ongoing challenges and stresses of municipal politics were taxing. Challenges include finding ways to balance the time and energy in municipal office with full-time nonprofit job and family.

Successful in their campaign and with many success stories from their tenure, this candidate shared that they faced an increase in bullying - especially in cyberspace - during their re-election campaign. It felt they were being targeted for supporting tax policies that were unpopular with certain communities and lobby groups.

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Community Engagement: In their early campaign, wrote to newspapers, spoke at radio stations, and went to all the campaign events. Many allies emerged that wanted to support them. A young mom with her baby in tow, this inspired many people, especially women.

Bridge Builder: A great bridge builder with a centrist philosophy, bringing together several different worldviews.

A Great Orator: Speaking experience from church, art class, sports teams and Toastmasters made her a very eloquent speaker at the Candidate Debates.

First Campaign	Being in office (4 years)	Re-Election Campaign

Elected to Office

Lost Re-Election

Decided to Run: Already knew they wanted to pursue a political career, but thought they would wait until their children were older. A conversation with young boy in the community catalyzed their decision to run. He said: "I've never seen anyone who looks like you before. I don't know what to do with you or what to say to you."

Resistance: Faced resistance both from people within their culture ("why do you want to do this") and from political gatekeepers ("are you sure you're ready for this? Do you have what it takes?").

Challenging Policy Conversations: While in office, became a central voice in several challenging policy conversations, including revisiting racist zoning laws and working on an anti-racism committee to elevate the voices of non-white citizens in their area, who often faced large obstacles to participation within the community's infrastructure.

Bullying: During re-election campaign, faced bullying within the community and in cyberspace. They were in the process of introducing a tax increase to fund the municipal government, and became the scapegoat for anti-tax lobbyists.

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Accessibility

Candidates with physical disabilities had lessened capacity for physically-intensive campaign activities. For example, visiting residents door-to-door requires candidates to cover a lot of ground. There are similar mobility requirements for other campaigning activities. While many candidates will brag about how many doors they knock on, there is little appreciation in our political culture for those who are not able to campaign traditionally in this fashion, with one candidate we interviewed mentioning how they were only able to do canvassing with the aid of a motorized scooter, an item itself which was quite costly to acquire, creating another barrier for participation. Neurodivergent candidates also face barriers along the campaign trail, with community members often misinterpreting nontraditional communication styles and personal presentation for a lack of charisma or capability.

Understanding barriers faced by diverse candidates is a nuanced subject. It requires us to both consider how general barriers all candidates for office face manifest within diverse communities, while also appreciating identity-specific barriers that exist for particular groups.

Opportunities for Further Study
Continue to fund research exploring the specific lived experiences of individuals from various equity-deserving groups in municipal politics in Ontario.

Prototype Ideas

Understanding diverse candidates' motivations, assets & enablers, barriers and underlying needs provides a base of knowledge and understanding from which AMO and their partners can design better strategies, resources and initiatives to support diverse residents of Ontario in their journey toward municipal office. After exploring the current state experiences of candidates, our discussions with research participants turned to an exploration of possible prototypes to improve the experiences and outcomes of diverse candidates in Ontario.

Several prototype ideas emerged to help guide AMO's actions and initiatives within the Healthy Democracy Project and beyond. We have grouped the prototype ideas into three (3) overarching categories:

1. **Ways to Better Support Diverse Candidates**: These prototypes address the ways in which diverse candidates can be better supported through their municipal politics journey, including (1) training & capacity building, (2) getting things done with enhanced social and financial capital and (3) supports to improve personal safety and mental wellness.
2. **Shifting the Mainstream Culture & Environmental Context**: These prototypes tackle the need for larger cultural shifts within Ontario municipalities and politics in order to be more welcoming to diverse candidates. This type of cultural intervention includes community education around anti-discrimination.
3. **Systemic Changes & Advocacy Stances:** These prototypes are larger system changes within Ontario municipal politics that AMO can take on as advocacy stances, including introducing campaign financing limits, term limits, codes of conduct, shared tenure, and improvements of working conditions and compensation for municipal public servants.

Category 1: Ways to Better Support Diverse Candidates

A. Training and Capacity Building

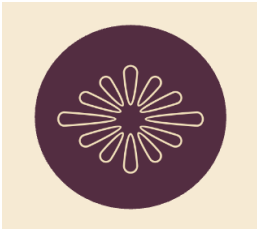*Targeted Trainings & Continued Improvement of Campaign Schools*

How might AMO develop and deliver critical training to diverse candidates describing what to expect on the campaign trail and how to navigate life in office? AMO and partners can teach diverse candidates the rules of engagement for political discourse and various methods of facilitating constructive dialogues in a community setting, enabling potential candidates with key skills to successfully navigate their campaign and potential tenure in office. Consider targeted recruitment of diverse candidates into these trainings to build stronger cohorts of potential diverse candidates. These trainings can cover a diverse set of topics including: (1) how to run a successful campaign, (2) how to successfully facilitate community dialogues and (3) how to effectively lead policy change once in office. Please note that AMO and partners should start education campaigns and communications outreach in the years *prior* to an election in order to give ample time to fill the pipeline with qualified, interested, and confirmed diverse candidates.

How might AMO build on existing campaign school models?
Campaign schools are extremely valuable training environments, but are relatively inaccessible to many diverse candidates. AMO can make a concerted effort to expand participation and adapt current campaign school content. [Maytree](#) and [CivicAction](#) have excellent leadership development models that AMO can draw from when considering continued improvement of campaign schools. Participants also suggested that AMO examine current and past models of fellowships, networks, and initiatives that have brought together diverse leaders. Among these programs includes the [FutureBuilds Program](#) by Monumental and the Infrastructure Institute at the University of Toronto and the [DiverseCity Fellows Program](#) administered by the CivicAction Leadership Foundation. Participants suggested that AMO can replicate these models and connect diverse candidates with former municipal servants.

	This prototype is related to **knowledge of the process, training & information gaps** barriers
	==Broadly Accessible Information Sessions in Communities== ***How might AMO and partners make information sessions about the process of campaigning most accessible to diverse candidates?*** When and where campaigning information sessions are being hosted is not common knowledge within most communities. AMO and partners should bring more information sessions directly into communities, hosting information sessions in high-traffic community spaces and virtually. These information sessions should be accompanied with targeted marketing and communication campaigns to inform community members within their online and physical spaces. This can include sending spokespersons into schools and workplaces. *This prototype is related to **knowledge about the opportunity, community encouragement, identity, & mentorship** barriers*
	==*Encouraging Communications That Speak Directly to Diverse Residents*== ***How might AMO and partners strongly encourage diverse candidates to run?*** The more proactive AMO and partners can be in their communications and encouragement to diverse residents, the better. Communication and marketing about running for office should include encouraging posters with compelling visuals (for example, like Uncle Sam's *We Want You* poster) strongly communicating to diverse residents that they are needed, that they are wanted, and that their uniqueness is necessary to improve the functioning of our municipal governments. Within these communication campaigns, tell the stories of past and current councillors, mayors and school board trustees from equity-deserving groups. Increasing the visibility of these exemplars will likely create a wave of diverse candidates saying, "I saw you do it, so I think I can too."

*This prototype is related to **sense of belonging, community encouragement, & confidence** barriers*

Easy-to-Access and Visually Appealing Resources

In addition to in-person and online information sessions, how might AMO create a visually appealing and easy-to-access how-to guide that demystifies campaigns for diverse candidates? AMO and partners can invest time and funding into the production of high-quality multimedia materials that outline the step-by-step process of becoming a candidate, running a campaign and being in office. The how-to guide can include visually appealing PDFs, interactive online resources, and videos.

Within this how-guide, AMO and partners can offer hard-to-find answers to common questions about how to sign up to be a candidate, tips and tricks about running a successful campaign, campaign financing, and information about the daily life of being a councillor, mayor and/or school board trustee. Potential candidates want to understand what to expect if elected.

*This prototype is related to **knowledge and understanding of running a campaign, and knowledge and understanding of the job** barriers*

Communications Support to Tighten Candidates' Messaging

How might AMO and partners support diverse candidates to tighten their platform messaging, to achieve a higher impact on the campaign trail? Articulating your platform message clearly, concisely, and in a relatable way is critical to a candidate's success during a campaign. Candidates need to appeal to the hearts and minds of their constituents, signalling their knowledge of key community needs and their commitments to residents. They need to do this using simple language that is easy to understand. AMO and partners can provide targeted training, feedback, and hands-on support to diverse candidates seeking to elevate the overall quality of their communications materials.

*This prototype is related to **knowledge, skills & training** barriers*

Youth Engagement & Grade School Education

How might AMO and partners work through schools to develop a pipeline of young, diverse candidates? AMO and partners can support students from a young age to consider a career in municipal government, particularly by showing young students people from diverse backgrounds in the fields of public administration, law and political office. AMO and partners can build a Speakers Bureau of diverse candidates (past and present) who can speak to youth, and can develop internships available to diverse students with municipal councils.

School progress should capture the minds of diverse youth and encourage them to pursue politics as a form of community engagement. Interactive programming for students can include social media town halls and curating youth-led programming.

Furthermore, AMO and partners can support school guidance counselors to play a role in educating young people about elected office as a viable career. Engaging young people in the discussion and sharing examples of diverse individuals who have already achieved municipal office in Ontario will help to motivate diverse youth to consider becoming civically engaged.

This prototype is related to **knowledge of the opportunity & community encouragement** *barriers*

B. Getting Things Done: Community Connection, Social & Financial Capital

Mentorships

How might AMO help diverse candidates receive support from elected officials who come from diverse backgrounds? This would make a positive difference in the experiences of diverse candidates running for office. Internally, mentors can provide much needed encouragement, tips and tricks on how to navigate the campaign trail. This can include coaching diverse candidates on how to navigate debates and coaching diverse candidates to confidently ask their constituents for the vote while canvassing. Participants spoke extensively about something as simple as a "buddy system" - having someone to call and ask questions to as they navigate entry into

municipal politics - being a necessary support for their success.

Externally, mentors can boost the reach of diverse candidates' campaigns as co-sponsors. This can include bringing in experienced individuals and influencers into the campaign team, reaching more constituents on media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. AMO can also help new candidates garner support from acclaimed candidates, further strengthening their base and reach. There are windows of opportunity to connect with acclaimed candidates, who are informed of their acclaimed status within certain windows of time. AMO and partners could help diverse candidates to make these potentially high-value connections.

This prototype is related to **social capital, community support, access to mentors and role models** *barriers*
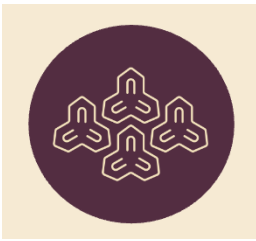
Community Connections

How might AMO and partners facilitate a strengthening community connections and symbiotic relationships for diverse candidates? Internally, AMO can help diverse candidates to form partnerships, whereby they can collaborate on their campaigns' administrative tasks (i.e. printing posters and signs). Through these partnerships, candidates can also share resources and knowledge about the campaign process. Externally, AMO can proactively connect diverse candidates to community organizations, professional networks, and labour unions that can amplify their reach and voter base.

This prototype is related to **social capital & community support** *barriers*

Matchmaking to Donors

How might AMO or partners help diverse candidates connect with potential donors? With many diverse candidates beginning their campaigns from the periphery of political power, AMO or its partners could proactively support diverse candidates in building relationships with potential donors. This can include targeted support to specific candidates, matchmaking events, and/or developing libraries and contact lists for both donors and candidates, facilitating conversations and relationship-building like a social platform.

	*This prototype is related to **financial capital** barriers*
	Facilitation Through the Process ***How might AMO & partners provide accompaniment services to diverse candidates along their campaigning journey?*** Candidates benefit from hands-on guidance and support as they navigate an array of administrative tasks along the campaigning journey. AMO and partners can provide accompaniment to diverse candidates, removing barriers to completion and helping candidates overcome inertia when challenges arise. For example, AMO and partners can support diverse candidates to complete their registration paperwork, a process which can often feel burdensome and discouraging. *This prototype is related to **knowledge of the campaigning process & encouragement** barriers*

C. Being Okay: Improving Personal Safety & Mental Wellness

	Peer Support Groups to Overcome Isolation & Loneliness ***How might AMO and partners facilitate peer support groups where diverse candidates can speak to each other and share their experiences?*** Talking to others with similar lived experiences can help to overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness. Building from networks of diverse candidates convened for this research and beyond, these conversations can be a source of community and support that give candidates the needed energy and strength to continue through their political careers. These peer support groups can provide brave spaces for diverse candidates to talk about difficult experiences, as well as be a forum for people to share resources, best practices and positive feedback. *This prototype is related to **mental health, community of belonging, access to resources, and mentorship** barriers*

Safety "Survival Kit"

How might AMO implement a support system for newly elected officials, teaching them how to navigate the world of municipal politics with resilience and care? Personal safety is a particular concern for racialized candidates, women, and transgender candidates. AMO and partners can become partners and allies to diverse candidates experiencing discrimination in harassment both by advocating for anti-discrimination within communities (see Category 2: Shifting Mainstream Culture & Environmental Context), and by meaningfully supporting diverse candidates who are canvassing in remote, rural and Northern communities with resources and in-personal accompaniment. This prototype also includes a commitment to actively hold space to talk about how identity affects a candidate's personal safety while campaigning, even if it causes discomfort.

*This prototype is related to **community support, belong, safety & security** barriers*

Hotline for Reporting Harassment or Abuse During Campaigns

How might AMO and partners strengthen systems of accountability and support for harassment? For diverse candidates experiencing harassment and bullying during their campaigns, AMO and partners could create a support hotline that serves two purposes. First, the hotline can offer access to trained mental health professionals for individuals in distress. Second, it can provide a reporting mechanism that increases transparency about cases of harassment and therefore strengthens structures of accountability.

*This prototype is related to **mental health, discrimination, bullying, & harassment** barriers*

Category 2: Shifting the Mainstream Culture & Environmental Context

Anti-Discrimination Campaigns & Community Education

How might AMO amplify a culture of respect and care for all Ontario residents running for office? Bullying and harassment of diverse candidates on the campaign trail stems from the cultural biases within the mainstream culture of Ontarians, where there are observable trends of discrimination against communities of colour, women, queer and transgender communities, people living with disabilities, neurodivergent people, and folks with non-Christian religious affiliations. AMO can become an advocate and partner to shifting the cultural fabric of Ontario by engaging communities in anti-bias and anti-discrimination education programming. This can include online sessions, in-person events and communications campaigns.

*This prototype is related to **mental health, discrimination, bullying, & harassment** barriers*

Humans of the Horseshoe

How might AMO amplify the stories and experiences of diverse candidates broadly in Ontario communities? One way to create a stronger sense of unity and care more broadly in Ontario's cultural fabric is to compassionately and enthusiastically amplify the stories and experience of diverse candidates. AMO can work with diverse communities to highlight individuals, groups, and neighbourhoods, celebrating the contributions and good works.

*This prototype is related to **mental health, discrimination, bullying, & harassment** barriers*

Category 3: Systemic Changes & Advocacy Stances

Campaign Finance

How might AMO advocate to level the playing field when it comes to campaign financing? Understanding the access to financial resources plays a major role in election outcomes, AMO can advocate to establish a maximum cap for total campaign donations that can be received, both financial and in-kind.

*This prototype is related to **financial capital & access to resources** barriers*

Explore Electoral Reforms such as Ranked Balloting, Term Limits, Lowered Voting Ages or Shared Tenure

How might AMO promote natural cycles of renewal in local democracy? AMO can help Ontario take lessons from other jurisdictions that have used electoral reform as a way to promote democratic renewal. Current electoral structures create real barriers to new and diverse candidates entering the system. Ideas like shared tenures, whereby more than one resident of a community can occupy a role as councillor, mayor, and/or school board trustee could help make municipal office seem much more appealing.
*Related to **incumbency & community mobilization** barriers*

Anti-Harassment Code of Conduct

How might AMO advocate for codes of conduct that limit harassment? Currently, there are few avenues to enforce good behavior or limit harassment of candidates. AMO and partners can collaborate to introduce anti-harassment codes of conduct, including mechanisms to report bad behaviour and disqualification from campaigns for bad behaviours.

*This prototype is related to **mental health, discrimination, bullying, & harassment** barriers*

Accessibility

How might AMO make both voting and candidacy more accessible for all community members? With particular thought toward people living with disabilities, and residents whose schedules do not allow for participation in civic life, AMO and partners can work to make municipal policy activities more accessible both for candidates and voters. This can include providing meaningful online participation, increasing the flexibility of scheduling within municipal policy activities, and ramping up communications across the province to spread the word about candidacy opportunities and voting.

This prototype is related to **accessibility, work/life balance, and community mobilization** *barriers*

Improving the Conditions of the Job

How might AMO advocate for better working conditions within municipal government roles, in order to attract more qualified candidates to run? Many folks are deterred from running by the lack of financial compensation, resourcing, and innate stressors and personal exposure that occurs when working in the public domain. AMO and partners can advocate for improved compensation models for municipal representatives, flexible working arrangements for folks living with disabilities, and rules of engagement that limit unnecessary public exposure for governing representatives.

Related to **compensation, accessibility, harassment, and work/life balance** *barriers*

Implications for AMO & Recommendations for Next Steps

When AMO first reached out to us on this work, we understood that this is new ground not only for AMO but also for the sector and the province generally.

AMO was eager for our findings to support not only their commitments under its Healthy Democracy Project, but also as a resource for sector partners and leaders in this area of work. Throughout our engagement it was understood that not all recommendations are for AMO to deploy or deliver on. AMO has an opportunity to continue its leadership on creating opportunities for diverse candidates and elected officials to see municipal governance as a viable and attractive opportunity. AMO believes that if municipal governance becomes more open, inclusive and welcoming, democracy generally, has an opportunity to strengthen.

Often times, *the process is the prototype.* Through the pursuit and implementation of this research effort, progress was made in bringing together diverse candidates, making them feel seen, and helping them to build bonds and supportive relationships with their peers. Most importantly, it allowed them to speak to some of the aspects of the experience that impacted their mental health, providing spaciousness for dialogue and candid conversation that isn't always available through traditional research and convening methods. At one moment during the first focus group, many of our team members reflected that it felt like we were convening the type of peer support group that people were asking for. There is an opportunity for AMO and its partners to continue to center diverse voices and lived experiences as you pursue various prototypes and emerging lines of work.

The risk-reward paradox mentioned in this report remains one of the most powerful findings that we came across. For everyone passionate about local democracy in Ontario, it is a powerful call to action. Elected office is never an easy job. But, it is essential that we ensure that new generations of intelligent, motivated and passionate Ontarians feel inspired to put their names forward for local elections. All of the potential responses we have outlined come from the understanding that if the scales are tipping towards making elected office seem more like a risk than a rewarding pursuit, we must put effort both into better articulating the rewards and benefits of public service and directly working to mitigate the personal, professional and mental health risks that come from responding to the call of joining a local race.

AMO has undertaken some important first steps in strengthening Ontario's democracy and municipal governance. We are hopeful that AMO and partners will continue to pursue this style of research, engaging more people from equity-deserving groups in each region of Ontario. Some opportunities for continued research include:

- Bringing the first focus group back together to more deeply evaluate their shared pool of resources and networks, strengthening their mutual commitment to intersectionality support each community's candidates
- To explore similarities and differences, future research opportunities include an in-depth study looking at the self-reported motivations of diverse candidates against the self-reported motivations of candidates who do not belong to equity-deserving groups.
- Engage more diverse candidates in participatory research conversations across a broad range of regions in Ontario (Central, Eastern, Northeastern, Northwestern, Southwestern), to better understand the distinct features of municipal politics based on the region and identity group.
- Survey data would benefit from a longer window of participation and more targeted recruitment. A new survey could be distributed to a larger base of past, present, and potential diverse candidates in each region of Ontario in order to develop a strong base of evidence supporting AMO's understanding of unique experiences based on both region and identity.
- Conduct research into the experiences of diverse elected officials once in office to better understand the reasons why many elected officials from diverse communities do not run for re-election.

This research is an important step into understanding the election journeys for Candidates in Ontario's local elections. An ongoing focus on "the process" when sharing the results and activating prototype ideas will ensure this research investment will contribute to a lasting impact on more inclusive, diverse municipal leadership and local decision making.

Appendix A. Key Takeaways from the Survey

Section 1: Overview

About the Survey

As part of its Healthy Democracy Project, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) is seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of diverse candidates running for - and attaining - municipal office in Ontario, with the goal of working to improve the experience and outcomes of diverse candidates. AMO is committed through the We All Win campaign to working to increase diversity on municipal councils to be more reflective of Ontario's diversity. Currently there are major gaps in our knowledge about the demographics of candidates and elected municipal leaders in Ontario, the experiences of diverse candidates in running for office and the best ways to support increased diversity in municipal elections and government.

These realities have spurred AMO to collaborate with Monumental Projects to convene a series of research and engagement activities, including primary research through interviews, focus groups, and a survey. This survey is part of a larger data collection effort to describe the motivations, experiences, barriers, assets, and underlying needs from a small sample size of diverse individuals pursuing municipal politics in Ontario.

Methodology

Using mostly AMO's established network, a call was disseminated to complete a brief 20-minute survey. In addition to exploring common barriers and assets, the survey widened the scope of potential participants for in-depth interviews and journey mapping.

Survey responses are anonymous and are collected, stored, and managed by Monumental Projects' protected network. Only analyzed findings will be shared with AMO and its partners. Survey analysis grouped data into various categories and compared to the overall response rate to highlight anything interesting, different, or that stands out, while tracking for themes related to our research questions including barriers, assets, and motivations.

This summary provides each question asked to survey respondents along with analysis results under each corresponding question. The summary aims to provide a detailed look into survey responses highlighting intriguing correlations, but the summary results articulated are not meant to be exhaustive. Summary highlights can be found below.

Our Respondents

We received 90 total responses to the survey and most respondents were white with a large percentage of educated, mature, white women from rural and remote areas of Ontario.

- **Total sample:** 90 respondents, most who were engaged through AMO's network
- **Rural focus:** The vast majority of respondents came from rural areas or small cities
- **Older sample:** Very few individuals were under 34, 54% are 34-59 and 41% are 60+
- **Predominantly white women:** Two-thirds identify as a woman and one-third identify as equity-deserving. 83% identify as white
- **Majority with a faith identity but not actively engaged in religion:** Three-quarters describe themselves as spiritual or religious, but nearly 70% mentioned they were not involved in a spiritual community.
- **Family focused:** Half live with dependents
- **Highly educated:** 95% have at least attended university or college
- **Mainly Winners:** 82% have ran and won an election while only 54% said they will run again
- **Geographical representative:** Respondents' geographical location is fairly evenly spread throughout Central, Eastern, Northeastern, Northwestern, and Southwestern Ontario.

Key Responses and Themes

While the thought of building better communities motivates most people to run for or consider running for office, municipal politics in Ontario is in crisis as many consider retirement or question the substantive impact of local governance. If the political environment and system does not better solve for **unique regional barriers** and the **significant financial and social risk** involved in running for municipal office in Ontario, the democratic fabric of Ontario is at risk of crumbling due to **a lack of quality leaders**.

Improving governance and community service motivates people to run.

- Many of the respondents were inspired to run for office to improve governance capacity and efficiencies or to be of service to their community, but white women particularly highlighted the importance and need for representation and inclusion, and democratic practices.

White women and racialized men were less likely to consider running for higher political offices.

- Of the respondents who indicated they ran for or considered running for Head of Council, Reeve, or Mayor, all of the men identified as Caucasian / White European or Canadian.
- Of all white female respondents, only 20% indicated they ran for or considered running for Head of Council/Mayor/Reeve or Deputy-Mayor, compared to 32% of total respondents

A lack of confidence in municipal governance to create change drives people away from electoral politics.

- Of those that decided not to run, most mentioned a lack of belief that their efforts would be rewarded with the impact they would like to see
  - Only one respondent indicated they would consider running in the future

Many respondents were not interested in running again due to high demand for a political career.

- Of our entire sample only 54% of respondents wanted to run again
- Although 96% of white women ran and won, only 40% of those said they will run again
- From those who do not want to run again, strong themes of folks feeling they had been in office long enough and either had lost interest or felt it was time to pass on the responsibility. For those who wanted to run again, the most likely reason was a feeling they had not accomplished everything they had set out to do and had more to achieve in office.
- **Interesting to notice** from qualitative responses on why people would not run again or run again, there was not much focus on the issues of harassment, lack of reciprocity, toxicity in politics. So hints to a different experience for white, women, who are established candidates in smaller communities.
- Typical responses on why folks didn't want to run again were connected to the nature of their tenure (too much time) and demands of the job on family and career (predominantly for white women)
- Those who wanted to continue a lot were driven by a desire to continue and deepen impact or existing enjoyment of the job. (predominantly for white women)
- Rationales for individuals from equity seeking groups for running again or not running again were not that distinct from white women.

Barriers and Assets

Strong motivations are needed to face and overcome the unique challenges of electoral politics in rural, remote, and Northern communities. With physical and social infrastructure still catching up to the rest of Ontario, potential candidates rely on their existing personal assets (community profile, knowledge and skills, employment flexibility) to overcome barriers related to social (lack of mentorship, trouble recruiting volunteers) and financial capital (raising campaign funds, negative impact on personal financial situation).

Financial impact was largest barrier for those who ran and won:

Impact on my job (work implications of taking part in a campaign)	**39%**
Lack of mentorship or advisors	**31%**
Recruiting campaign volunteers	**28%**
Financial (personal financial impact of running for office)	**27%**
Financial (salary for position not sufficient or economically viable)	**24%**
Experiences of harassment (online or in person)	**21%**
Misinformation that was shared about me or my platform/policy positions.	**21%**
Financial (raising enough campaign funds)	**20%**
I did not feel I have all the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities	**17%**
Gaining media coverage	**17%**
Limited community connections and engagements	**13%**
Limited public profile in my community	**11%**
Lack of available child care	**10%**
I felt I would be alone and/or unsupported	**9%**

Community profile was biggest asset for those who ran and won:

Existing profile in my community	**73%**
Flexibility of my employment (ability to balance campaigning with work responsibilities)	**51%**
I had all the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities	**51%**
Affiliations and memberships (active involvement in associations, faith groups, unions or other organizations)	**35%**
Strong mentorship or advisors	**34%**
Financial (ability to manage financial impact of running for office)	**32%**
Gaining media coverage	**20%**
Financial (having a strong base of donors)	**18%**
Recruiting campaign volunteers	**18%**

Feelings of loneliness and lack of support are directly connected to other social capital barriers such as lack of mentorship and limited community connections.

- Although only 8.5% of respondents who ran and won indicated that feeling they would be alone or unsupported was a barrier, all of those responses were accompanied by a lack of mentorship or advisors, limited public profile, limited community connections, or trouble recruiting campaign volunteers.

What respondents saw as the most important assets, they did not necessarily see the absence of it as being as critical of a barrier

- While 28% of total respondents who ran and won indicated recruiting campaign volunteers as a barrier, only 18% said it was an asset.

Media coverage not seen as impactful to campaign results and time in office.

- Not only was gaining media coverage seen as not a significant barrier to most folks who ran and won (17%), it was only mentioned once as a barrier or asset for those that ran and lost, and was not indicated as a perceived barrier or asset for those that did not run.

Appendix A. Key Takeaways from the Survey

Geographical location further nuances identity and intersectionality as region was the largest driver of variation, more so than other demographics.

Barriers - Financial and Social Capital:
- For those who ran and won, impact on their professional employment (39%) was the most selected barrier and was disproportionately experienced by those in Southwestern Ontario (47%)
- Lack of mentorship (31%) was also a major barrier for those that ran and won and largely impacts Northwestern Ontario (50%)
- Recruiting volunteers is especially difficult for other equity-deserving groups (36%) and those that live in Central Ontario (50%), but seems to be a minimal barrier for Northeasterners (8%)
- Similarly, personal financial impact effects Central (43%) and Southwestern (35%) Ontario relatively more than other regions in the province (13 - 23%)
- For those that ran and lost, recruiting volunteers (50%) and experiencing harassment (50%) were the most selected barriers

Assets - Community Profile Is Critical:
- For those that ran and won, 73% of respondents noted their existing community profile as an asset. Though, only 53% of those belonging to an equity-deserving group and 54% of Northeasterners cited this as an asset
- While flexibility of job (50%) and necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities (50%) were the second and third most selected assets, only 38% of Northwesterners, respectively, cited either as an asset
- Those from Central (43%) and Northeastern (38%) Ontario are less likely to run again relative to the average (54%)

Aging Communities:
- Qualitative responses alluded to remote and rural communities in Ontario being left behind and still trying to catch up to the rest of Ontario (lack of available childcare, aging rural communities in need of care, slow moving processes makes volunteerism more impactful, but the keys to the municipality still seems to be in the hands of municipal staff)

Section 2: Survey Results

Section 1: Demographic Information

All respondents completed this section (90 respondents total).

Question 1: Age

22.2% of respondents indicated that they are between 65-69 years old.
13.3% of respondents indicated that they are between 55-59 years old.

Other responses included:
- 35-39 (12.2%)
- 40-44 (11.1%)
- 60-64% (10%)

Question 2: Gender

65.6% of respondents identify as a woman.
33.3% of respondents identify as a man
1 respondent identifies as gender non-binary

Question 3: Do you identify as being a part of any of the following equity-deserving groups? (you can choose multiple responses)

62.2% of respondents indicated that they do not identify as being a part of any equity-deserving groups.
8.9% of respondents indicated that they have a low-income level.

Other responses included:
- Racialized person (7.8%)
- Indigenous (First Nations/Inuit/Metis) (4.4%)
- Neurodivergent (cognitive) (3.3%)

Question 4: How do you self-identify? (you may select more than one)

83.3% of respondents indicated that they identify as being Caucasian / White European.

Other responses included:
- Canadian (5.6%)
- Black (4.4%)
- First Nations (4.4%)

Appendix A. Key Takeaways from the Survey

Question 5: Do you have dependents that live with you (including but not limited to children and aging parents)?

50% of respondents indicated that they have dependents that live with them.

Question 6: How would you describe your religious, spiritual, or faith-based background?

56% of respondents indicated that they have a Christian background.
14.4% of respondents indicated they are atheist.

Other responses included:
- Spiritual, not religious (12.2%)
- Agnostic (10%)
- Prefer not to say (10%)

Question 7: Are you an active member of a faith-based community?

70% of respondents indicated that they are not an active member of a faith-based community.

Question 8: Please describe your Job/Profession or Industry (text box)

At least 35% of respondents are business or industry professionals
At least 25% of respondents are retired
Over 13% of respondents identify public service or elected office as their profession
Over 13% of respondents work in education or health sectors

Question 9: What's the highest level of education you have pursued?

45.6% of respondents indicated that they pursued post-graduate education.

Other responses included:
- Some post-secondary (28.9%)
- Undergraduate (18.9%)
- High school (6.7%)

<u>**Municipal Political Profile:**</u>

Question 10: Describe the type of municipality where you ran for office or considered running:

52.2% of respondents live in rural municipalities.
25.6% of respondents live in small urban municipalities.

Other responses included:
- Large urban (11.1%)
- Remote (6.7%)
- Urban / rural mix (4.4%)

Question 11: What role did you run for, or consider running for? (check all that apply)

74.4% of respondents ran for or considered running for Councillor.
21.8% of respondents ran for or considered running for Head of Council/Mayor/Reeve.

Other responses included:
- Deputy-Mayor (10.3%)
- School Board Trustee (9%)

Question 12: What region of Ontario did you live in at the time?

- Southwestern (23.3%)
- NorthWestern (21.1%)
- Eastern (20%)
- Central (17.8%)
- Northeastern (17.8)

Question 13: Optional: What is the name of the municipality where you ran for office, or considered running for office? (text box)

4 respondents ran or considered running in the municipality of Wawa.

There were also multiple respondents who ran or considered running in Kenora, Ramara Township, Temiskaming Shores, Greenstone, Clarington, Collingwood, and Waterloo.

Other municipalities include Elizabethtown-Kitley, Russell Township, East Ferris, Evanturel, Black-River Matheson, Arran-Elderslie, Atikokan, Madoc Township, Tudor and Cashel Township, Saugeen Shores, and North Stormont

Question 14: Select the statement that best describes you:

82.2% of respondents were elected after running for office.
7.7% of respondents considered running for office but didn't run.
6.7% of respondents ran for office and were not elected.

Section 2: Exploring your campaign & time in office

This section was filled out by respondents who ran for office and won their campaign (82.2% of the respondents).

Question 15: What inspired you to run for office in the first place? What was your platform? (text box)

Many of the respondents were inspired to run for office to **improve governance capacity and efficiencies** or to **be of service to their community**, but white women particularly highlighted the importance and need for **representation and inclusion,** and **democratic practices**.

Question 16: Which of these barriers did you encounter during your campaign and/or time in office?

39.4% of the responses indicated that the impact on their job was a barrier with other equity-deserving groups (43%) and Southwesterns (47%) experiencing job impact slightly more than average.

31% of responses note lack of mentorship or advice as a barrier, but disproportionately impacts those that live in Northwestern Ontario (50%).

28.2% of responses mention recruiting campaign volunteers as a barrier, but disproportionately impacts those that live in Central (50%) and Northeastern (8%) Ontario.

26.8% of responses indicate personal financial impact of running a campaign as a barrier, but disproportionately impacts those that live in Central Ontario (43%).

23.9% of responses mention insufficient salary as a barrier, but disproportionately impacts those that live in Central (35%) and Northeastern (8%) Ontario.

Question 17: What were the main assets that supported you during your campaign?

73.2% of the responses indicated that their existing profile in the community proved to be an asset during their campaign, but equity-deserving groups (53%) and Northeasterners (54%) mention their community profile as an asset relatively less than average.

50% of responses mention job flexibility as an asset, and 50% of responses note having the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities, but only 38% of Northwesterners indicate either as an asset.

Question 18: Do you plan to run again?

53.5% of responses indicated yes, they will run again with the rate lower in Central (43%) and Northeastern (38%) Ontario, and **much higher among equity-deserving groups** (75%)

29.6% are undecided and 16.9% indicate they will not run again.

Question 19: Optional: Could you let us know what are some of the reasons for the answer you selected about whether you will run again? (text box)

Many of the respondents who said they will run again mentioned having **unfinished business**, continuing to **contribute and make a difference**, the **joy** they get **serving the community**, and **building on the experience and skills** they gained during their first term(s).

Some respondents who said they would not run again mentioned **retiring** or **moving on** to another role, possibly letting **someone new or younger take their place**. Some responses also noted the **limited impact** of their role.

For those undecided, the **nature of a political career**, especially the challenges to **time commitments** and **work-life balance**, has some respondents questioning the **viability of continuing** in politics. Other respondents are **considering retirement**, and one respondent notes **misinformation** being spread.

Section 3: Your experience running for office

This section was filled out by respondents who ran for office but did not win their campaign (7.7% of the total respondents).

Question 20: What inspired you to run for office in the first place? What was your platform? (text box)

Responses followed along the same themes of **good governance** and **community service**, but also mentioned the **need for change** and **opportunity to make an impact**.

Question 21: Which of these barriers did you encounter during your campaign and anticipated time in office?

50% of responses note recruiting campaign volunteers as a barrier.

50% of responses mention experiences of harassment (online or in person).

Question 22: What were the main assets that supported you during your campaign?

50% of responses note their existing profile in the community as an asset.

50% of responses mention having all the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Question 23: Do you plan to run in a future election?

50% of responses indicate they will run again in a future election.

Question 24: Optional: Could you let us know what are some of the reasons for the answer you selected about whether you will run again? (text box)

One respondent mentioned they would run again because they are **not done** doing what they set out to do, while another alluded to the **opportunity to improve** programs and policies.

Another respondent said they would not run again because it would be **frustrating** "working with people who are not results oriented," while another respondent was undecided because their opponent won despite being "very nasty" and deploying "**dirty politics**."

Section 4. Deciding not to run

This section was filled out by respondents who decided not to run for office (6.7% of total respondents).

Question 25: What inspired you to consider running for office? What would have been your platform? (text box)

Responses focused on **improving governance** efficiency and **transparency** while **adding value** to the community.

Question 26: What barriers did you perceive to running for office?

60% of responses note the impact on their job as a barrier.

40% of responses mention their limited public profile and 40% indicate the personal financial impact as a barrier.

Question 27: What assets did you believe would have supported you running for office?

- Strong donor base (40%)
- Ability to manage financial impact (40%)
- Flexibility of employment (40%)
- Recruiting campaign volunteers (40%)
- Affiliations and memberships (40%)

Question 28: Optional: Ultimately what drove your decision to not run for office? Would you ever consider running in the future? (text box)

Responses focused on the **limited ability to make an impact** in municipal governance, the **rigid structures that make change difficult**, and the **strenuous time commitment needed** to run.

Section 3. Open Ended Responses

Below are some select responses from open-ended questions (list is not all inclusive).

Question 28: Optional: Ultimately what drove your decision to not run for office? Would you ever consider running in the future? (text box)

"My current job in a municipality leave little time. I see too much focus on "equity" and not on equality. It is reverse discriminations and becoming very difficult to deal with!"

"Decided that municipal governance rules restrictive to progress and accomplishments - I might consider running in the future."

Question 25: What inspired you to consider running for office? What would have been your platform? (text box)

"Those in office have little to no knowledge of how to run a multi-million dollar business and make decisions based on personal profit or follow the Province without questioning. What works in some areas does not work well in others. One size does not fit all and people need to stand up and say no!"

Question 19: Optional: Could you let us know what are some of the reasons for the answer you selected about whether you will run again? (text box)

"I'm unsure of my career path in the next few years. I am not paid enough in this role to sustain my family and so must consider additional employment soon. My responsibility as a parent is also weighing in the decision."

"Almost wanted to select undecided because there are challenges that would change my mind and I don't know that what I'm doing now is sustainable for the long term (working a full time job and council because council remuneration is not sufficient to be considered main source of income). I want to run again but I worry that I could change my mind. The supports for women with young families are non existent."

"I have young children, both involved in sports, I am involved with our fire department, and frankly I am losing interest. There are old political quagmires that I frankly don't want to lose any sleep over, and am unsure that I can or should pursue changing for the better…I am one year into my second term, however I am finding my personal life being constantly put on the back burner. I am committed on many of my "days off". And am not happy about the limited time I have to take care of my personal and family needs. The cost of living increasing as it has lately, means I also find myself working extra shifts to stay financially in good order. Again, less free time. I feel that I am too busy to be as involved as I would like to be in municipal business. I will run again later in life, when I can be as committed as I feel I should be. It is important that we as individuals accommodate the position, when and how we best can. Right now, I am being pulled in too many directions. I may resign."

Appendix B. Key Takeaways from Focus Group 1: Experienced Individuals & Organizations Serving Diverse Candidates

Summary Report

This summary report is intended to summarize feedback from participants at the meeting and is not a verbatim transcript.

Date: December 19, 2023
Location: Zoom
Study and Facilitation Team: Ariel Sim (Monumental Projects) Zahra Ebrahim (Monumental Projects) Kofi Hope (Monumental Projects) Benjamin Bongolan (Monumental Projects) Eli Rose (Monumental Projects) Petra Wolfbeiss, AMO Stewart McDonough, AMO

Purpose of Focus Group

This focus group, the first of two to be held over the course of this research, consisted of community leaders deeply involved in advancing equity and representation within municipal politics. They represented many intersectional identities, cultural backgrounds, and professional sectors. Some participants had direct experience in municipal office while a majority of participants have been part of grassroots and non-profit groups to help capture a more diverse range of perspectives and representation on the current state of diversity amongst elected officials. The goal of the session was to explore common assets and barriers

for diverse candidates running for municipal office through a series of discussion questions that were used to explore the focus group's thoughts and perceptions around municipal government and the prospect of running for municipal office, to learn about their motivations to run in the future, and brainstorm ideas that AMO and other municipalities in Ontario can do to support diverse candidates.

Overview

This engagement helped us collect insightful perspectives of how AMO can help make the experience of running for municipal office more equitable and inclusive. The focus group provided the study and facilitation team an opportunity to engage with a vibrant group of grassroots leaders, professionals, and representatives of many communities and cultural backgrounds to engage in a conversation on their experiences which included the barriers that are preventing them from meaningful participation in municipal politics, assets that would help enable them to run for office, and ideas to improve municipal politics in Ontario.

Unsurprisingly, the motivations to run for office cited by focus group participants were expected and commonly known experiences. These motivations included the desire for representation in elected positions, to have the opportunity to make an impact on local issues, and to support other members of their community to access opportunities in municipal politics.

Participants shared stories of how they strived to combat underrepresentation by taking on representation themselves. A participant shared a time when they worked in a political office for many years that had no diverse leadership. In the conversation we heard, they shared how *"It was frustrating not to see other racialized and Indigenous people in these particular roles."* and how the office *"couldn't identify one Indigenous staffer and did land acknowledgements all the time"*. Participants also expressed concerns about underrepresentation for specific communities, as an example, for 2SLGBTQ+ communities, due to the *"fear of the unknown"* participants shared that people involved and invested in politics don't know "what trans is' and how candidates from 2SGLBTQ+ candidates receive little financial support in the political arena. The conversation also revealed the current state of trans representation in municipal politics and the extreme underrepresentation of the trans community in politics at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels in Canada with "*no trans women anywhere in any position of authority"*, and the barriers faced by members of the disability community with the need to *"cover a lot of ground"* by door knocking on thousands of doors which can be especially difficult for those who have mobility-related disabilities.

Throughout the conversation, virtually all participants expressed the need to have adequate resources and financial support that would help advance their political campaign efforts,

Appendix B. Key Takeaways from Focus Group 1: Experienced Individuals & Organizations

and how for diverse candidates, this can have a visceral impact on personal finances which are especially difficult for people with families to support. A participant shared how the costs of signs are a significant barrier because it must cover a large geographic boundary, and how costs are especially more difficult for parents because "*for a mother of 3, signs are taking money out children's mouths*" and how "*Going into my personal finances, just that process alone would make me think I am doing it selfishly.*"

As the conversation progressed, participants shared their concerns for the well-being of their families. Since campaigns typically require candidates to maintain a public platform and have their faces on large signs a participant shared how someone put a bullet through one of their signs, and said "*What if I had a daughter at that time who saw her fathers face with a bullet hole? What would that do to a young child? If I'm putting my family out there, it might not be worth it, maybe someone else should take this on that doesn't have these barriers or risks.*"

The conversation around safety continued, and a participant stressed the importance of being transparent about the dangers and challenges of managing a campaign for women and even more dangerous for trans women. In the conversation we heard about the urgent need to be "*forthright about the possibility of retaliation*" and not to "*paint a rosy picture*" on the current realities and dangers trans women and women can feel and experience when running for office.

The final part of our conversation focused on ideas to improve municipal politics for diverse candidates, and the theme of transparency resonated with many participants. particularly around the sharing of resources, and information about how to access materials, supplies, and services that are needed to run a campaign. One participant suggested making resources and information transparent, and to "have a list of all sign printers, accountable services, and robocall services" available for diverse candidates to access. We also heard about the need for municipal-level advocacy, and the need for cities to help activate spaces for political debate, and the need for capacity building for diverse candidates through education and training. The ideas shared by participants will help create an exciting road map for AMO as the organization enters the next stage of supporting diverse candidates in municipal politics.

Barriers

This part of the conversation elicited the greatest response and participants were very eager to draw on their lived and professional experiences which led to a very comprehensive conversation on the barriers, challenges, and factors that make municipal politics a difficult undertaking for diverse candidates.

Money is a Unifying Barrier for All Diverse Candidates: Based on the conversation, virtually all participants shared how challenging municipal elections can be without sufficient funds to manage a campaign. In the conversation, participants mentioned these costs often involve hiring a firm to make calls for your campaign, hiring staff, and how "support from family and friends can only get you so far in a campaign.", and another participant shared that they "don't have any problems that couldn't be solved by a large amount of money or campaign bus."

The Incumbent Advantage is Tremendous: In the conversation, many participants shared their challenges with competing against incumbents. A participant shared how the "incumbent advantage is absolutely staggering", especially because some potential supporters and donors are afraid to financially support candidates because audit fees become a part of public record, and fear an incumbent would find out about their donation. Incumbents also garner support of political parties to support their campaigns.

> *"A misconception people have about municipalities is that it's not a race where you wear a party hat. Parties are always behind candidates and the incumbent advantage is tremendous at the municipal level."*

An Absence of Role Models and Mentors Creates a Climate of Isolation: In the conversation it was stressed by many participants how isolating the campaign experience can be, and one participant mentioned how "women feel alone once they are elected" and how it would be advantageous to speak to in an open and honest conversation. Another participant shared that "because of a lack of representation we have an absence of role models and mentors- we need more role models". We also heard that seeing stories of diverse candidates running and losing makes others in those communities feel like they can't make it themselves.

A Deep Need for Accessibility and Inclusion for People with Disabilities: Ableism and challenges for people with disabilities was a barrier identified in the conversation. We heard about how candidates with physical disabilities had lessened capacity for door-knocking which requires candidates to cover a lot of ground, and there are similar mobility requirements for other campaigning activities. There is also a barrier for neurodivergent candidates along the campaign trail, with citizens often misinterpreting nontraditional communication and presentation for a lack of charisma. One participant urged everyone in the conversation to recognize that *"Disability issues are all issues, nothing about us without us"* which further stresses the importance of analyzing all barriers and challenges of municipal politics with a critical disability lens.

A Lack of Awareness of the Trans Community: Participants expressed challenges associated with organizations and political groups not being educated about trans communities, and how these communities are not approached or courted within the world of municipal politics. One participant attributed this disconnect between political parties and the trans

people to a "fear of the unknown" and a lack of awareness of trans issues and experiences. In the conversation a participant shared that a major challenge for the trans community is about "perception, trans misogyny, lateral violence" and how liberty is something that isn't shared equally with trans communities in society.

The Deep Impact of Familial Stress: Families are particularly susceptible to attacks and being impacted by political campaigns. The decision of putting your face on a sign is a big part of a campaign since identification of a candidate is critical. This could result in signs being vandalized and putting extreme pressures and stress on relatives who have to witness a high level of vitriol against you. In the conversation one participant shared how childcare is often placed on women more than men, and shared how they had to make decisions between "attending a ribbon cutting" or attending to her young family.

> *"Because of my family it might not be worth it. Maybe someone else should take this on"*

Gaps in Skills and Knowledge Campaign Management: Participants noted a steep learning curve when building name recognition for the ballot. It is difficult to find resources and knowledge about how to run a campaign, how to seek donors, and how to form and manage a campaign team. In the conversation we heard concerns about how information is often "kept out of the public", how there is a lack of knowledge on the "logistics and practicality" of running a campaign, and how diverse need support to "figure out how the system works".

Assets

Meaningful Civic Engagement through Grassroots Formations: Many participants were involved in grassroots organizing around civic engagement and training in political literacy within a wide array of organizations representing faith based communities and equity-deserving groups. What made these experiences especially meaningful because it allowed participants to engage in civic engagement while seeing themselves reflected amongst other people of similar backgrounds who have the same political aspirations. One participant noted that their organization allowed its members to be involved at their own pace and in their own way by allowing them to "be active or involved in whichever capacity they feel" in their civic engagement programs.

Changing the Face of Leadership by Coaching and Training Diverse Candidates: Many participants who worked in political offices shared that these experiences gave them insights into the realities and challenges of underrepresentation in elected leadership roles. However, after witnessing these inequalities they used their background in politics and community organizing to help change the leadership landscape by coaching other diverse candidates on how to manage a campaign. Participants also noted their participation in larger movements advancing democratic participation. These communities of practice and

shared values often provide mentorship from professionals in political spaces (such as Chiefs of Staff). Community organizations, volunteering, campaign schools, academic placements and practicums, and movement communities gave them a window to the world of politics and sparked an interest in making changes within the political system.

> *"I was in a political office for many years and it was frustrating not to see other racialized and Indigenous people in leadership roles. I made it a point to be involved in politics and utilize my experience."*

Support from Campaign Firms are Critical for Success: Support from a campaign firm will help a candidate develop a critical path for a successful campaign. These services include outreach and engagement activities, planning for door knocking, and making calls within the community. Participants acknowledged that this is necessary because drawing from personal support networks such as family and friends has limitations when campaigning. In the conversation a participant shared that you must *"hire a firm to make calls for you and hire staff, you can only get so much family support."*

Leveraging Community Support: Participants shared how their personal, faith-based, and cultural communities were advantageous in garnering support for their political campaigns, especially within very close and tight-knit communities. Having intimate knowledge of the internal realities and lived experiences of their communities provided participants with valuable insights which they used to help create meaningful change for the communities they are a part of.

> *"If you are a tight demographic community or ward you may be able to get people from your church or Mosque to support you. If you have the advantage of being from a tight ethnic demographic you might be able to mimic the support of a political party."*

Ideas to Improve Municipal Politics for Diverse Candidates

In this final part of the conversation the focus was on the ideas, strategies, and recommendations on how municipal politics can be made more inclusive and impactful for diverse candidates. These insights will help shape the next stage of AMO's work and can be used to create a new roadmap for future projects and initiatives.

Mentorship Will be Instrumental to the Success of Diverse Candidates: Mentorship, when done right, can lead to a transformative experience for diverse candidates, as it gives them

access points to information, resources, and offers a space for reflection and knowledge exchange. One participant expressed how a lack of diversity and representation in municipal politics also results in "*an absence of role models and mentors*". Participants provided many examples of what mentorship can look like. This includes one on one sessions, where diverse candidates can talk to specialists and experts on campaign related topics such as campaign finances, social media, and signage. Participants said that a mentor/mentee interaction should be a space for honest and open conversations and how mentorship can address the challenges of loneliness and isolation during a campaign, with one participant indicating that "women feel lonely during a campaign".

> *"We should leverage mentors who can explain how city hall works and how decisions get made."*

Level the Playing Field through Education and Training: In the conversation participants shared how a lot of information about campaign management is kept out of the public domain. One participant noted that "Civic education for candidates levels the playing field" and it was suggested that AMO can "democratize the knowledge of how to run a campaign", and share information of how to craft a platform, how to seek donors, and how to manage a campaign team. Some of the bigger ticket items are having access to space, being visible, developing literature, and gaining polling support. Making information about the campaign process transparent will help advance education and training for diverse candidates, and can include having a readily available list of all sign printers, accountable services and robocall services.

Amplify the Voices of Diverse Candidates through Mutual Networks and Platforms: In the conversation participants suggested AMO facilitate a series of groups and convenings that bring diverse candidates together on a regular basis. In these spaces, diverse candidates will have the space to speak openly about their experiences, share resources, and make alliances toward mutual success. Having a platform to share stories and experiences will also help amplify the voice of diverse candidates. One participant explained how "in some ways, the focus group felt like an early prototype of an ongoing meet-up" which signals that our time with these participants is potentially the beginning of an ongoing conversation and initiative for AMO to pursue. Another participant stressed how municipalities can support a public platform for diverse candidates, and that even "5 minutes of airtime" would "make it easy for everyone to know more about the candidate".

Making Connections and Designing Programs that Foster Financial Support: Having a readily available fund or revolving pool of assets is advantageous to candidates. In the conversation we heard ideas of how AMO can help diverse candidates meet potential donors, and develop financial support programs which offer micro grants to help cover some initial campaign costs. One participant shared that the "micro grant" concept is

important because it would allow candidates to "have funds up front". There was also another existing model of a micro-grant program that a participant suggested AMO could model call the Summer Company:

> " *There is a program for young entrepreneurs called the* [Summer Company](#) *that gives them $3000 to start their own company; $1500 at the beginning and at the end. This concept can apply to an equity seeking group for this micro grant.*"

Discussion Questions

Part 1. Exploring the Current State

1. Tell us a bit about yourself. What do you do? Who do you serve?
   (what's your geography, what's your day job and in your political work who do you serve)

2. What are the main barriers that people from the community you serve face, in running for municipal office?
   PROBE
   a. Deciding to run
   b. Running
   c. Staying in office

3. What are the **assets** that people from the community you serve bring to running a successful municipal campaign?

Part 2. How to Make It Better

4. What **changes can be made that would improve the outcomes** for people you work with?

   PROBE
   How could current processes and spaces become more welcoming?
   a. What are some low hanging fruit?
   b. Any wild or radical ideas you'd like to share with us?

Appendix B. Key Takeaways from Focus Group 1: Experienced Individuals & Organizations

Appendix C. Key Takeaways from the Focus Group 2: Potential Candidates

Summary Report

This summary report is intended to summarize feedback from participants at the meeting and is not a verbatim transcript.

Date: January 18, 2024
Location: Zoom
Study and Facilitation Team: Ariel Sim (Monumental Projects) Zahra Ebrahim (Monumental Projects) Kofi Hope (Monumental Projects) Benjamin Bongolan (Monumental Projects) Eli Rose (Monumental Projects) Stewart McDonough (AMO)

Purpose of Focus Group

This focus group was the second of two group sessions hosted for the research and focused on engaging potential candidates for municipal office. The goal of this focus group was to explore younger professionals' perceptions about running for municipal office in Ontario, explore possible motivations to run in the future, and brainstorm ways that AMO and other organizations might encourage and support diverse candidates to run for municipal office in Ontario.

Overview

This conversation provided many insights and experiences that are common amongst professionals who are actively engaged in the city-building and social impact space. However, there was a layer of complexity to these stories as we heard about their perceptions of municipal politics, the challenges they've experienced, and solutions that can help AMO create more positive experience for diverse candidates.

When reflecting on whether they would consider running for municipal office, we heard a wide range of responses. One participant shared how they were highly involved in community work and had a large amount of "social capital" and people they can turn to for support, but hesitant to be engaged in municipal politics due to a "lack of a formalized network" and the strong perception that you need a significant amount of financial capital and raise funds to be competitive in the political arena. In the conversation a participant expressed how this need for financial support often leads diverse candidates to "pander to people with money" and how they felt a strong sense of liberation when they realized that they no longer wanted to be involved in politics but instead "be authentic, focus on good work" and that they can achieve this without compromising their values.

A common thread we heard throughout the conversation was about "the burden of representation", and how this is especially difficult in communities that may be fractured or divided, and the difficulty of speaking on behalf of an entire area, region, or community where you may "get notoriety that you don't want".

Virtually all participants expressed their concerns for safety. One participant shared how "the stakes are so much higher than they ever were before" and had deep concerns for physical and psychological safety if there were to run a campaign. The conversation around safety led one participant to reflect on their concerns of how they would be perceived by voters and how they would be worried if they would be "questioned as a Canadian" and how they don't "want to bring shame or insecurity to a working class community". A participant shared a story about how they would be well positioned to run for office and is asked "every year by 30 people to run", but still has concerns for safety and retaliation if they were elected into office and recalls a time when white supremacists stormed their neighborhood as a form of resistance of their community organizing work.

As the conversation focused on ideas to improve the experience of municipal elections for diverse candidates, participants stressed the importance of drawing from existing models, fellowships, and convenings that bring diverse leaders together. Participants also shared the need for an initiative that offers resources that would help diverse candidates learn about the full campaign life cycle, with details of how to conceptualize, develop, implement, and evaluate a campaign from beginning to end.

Barriers

This section highlights the barriers which participants felt would greatly impact their ability to run for office. This part of the conversation also sparked the highest level of response as we had a conversation about barriers that ranged from online toxicity to the burden of representation.

Online Toxicity is at an All Time High: Participants have expressed that polarization and online toxicity is at an all time high, and some may not want to be in the public eye for certain issues because it may result in people reaching out to their employer and can impact professional reputations. In the conversation a participant shared how they "*don't want to be seen or be in the arena for certain issues*" and how in this new digital era "*the stakes are so much higher than ever before and it's so easy for everything to fall apart if you are in a playing field because of alt right and white supremacist movements.*"

Witnessing Political Candidates Change Fundamentally for Social and Financial Capital: Diverse candidates often find themselves in positions where they have to network and align themselves with high profile groups that have access to funds and resources. In the conversation a participant shared an experience of how they've seen people get elected and "*change who they are as they are building towards social capital*" and decided that they no longer wanted to be a part of a system that wasn't reflective of their personal values. We also heard a story of how the strategy of winning an election requires canvassing for a candidate in "*priority areas*"-locations that will garner the highest number of votes, and how certain communities are neglected due to the perception that people in that community don't vote and aren't involved in municipal elections. The participant described this experience as "*a moral dilemma to build the political and social capital*" and questioned "*is it really worth it for that game.*"

The Uncertainty of Creating Change within a Broken System: Participants shared how the decision to run for office felt even more difficult because working as an elected official doesn't seem "financially lucrative" and how the "risk seems higher than the reward". In the conversation participants questioned whether they would actually be able to create change when "the system feels so broken", and how they would feel limited in what an elected official can actually do to create change and serve the community.

> *The question of progress seems like a question mark, will we see progress? With Short term cycles, will it just be reversed after such a huge investment?*

The Burden of Representation within Diasporic Communities

We heard from participants about how difficult it would be to represent an entire diasporic group and community if they decided to run for municipal office. A participant shared how "any time a racialized candidate is in the public sphere you are seen to represent the Black community or South Asian community, or this big catch all group" and that we have to recognize that the "community is a community of multiple communities" . Another participant shared that it was difficult enough coming to Canada and going through the immigration and settlement process, that moving into municipal politics feels like "a risk and difficult option".

Witnessing the Collective Burnout of Diverse Candidates: In the conversation many participants had volunteer experiences which provided them with insights of running for office and the opportunity to witness the realities and challenges of managing a campaign. One participant shared how as they *"see more people in my community go through this experience of running for municipal office, the collective burnout of running emanates out even if I'm not running myself."* which makes them feel reluctant to run for elected office themselves.

Assets

These assets reflect the experiences, access points to opportunities, and conditions that participants felt were needed for them to confidently run for municipal office.

- **Youth Opportunities Help Create the Critical Path to Success:** In the conversation we learned that many participants had political aspirations in their youth and have had a broad range of volunteer experiences in campaigns and within councilor offices. This provided them with insights into the world of municipal politics and provided them the opportunity to make meaningful connections with political candidates and elected officials. One participant shared that "*From wanting to become a candidate to becoming a candidate, you need the right conditions, a team, an systems in place, and you start building out those systems at a young age.*" These opportunities are critical at a young age because it helps plant the initial seeds that would help youth gain the social capital, skills, and resources they need to be successful in municipal politics.

- **The Right Conditions Must be in Place:** Participants expressed that they would consider running for office if the right conditions were in place that would guarantee a positive experience. This includes having a team of like-minded candidates either in office or running for office as part of a team slate. One participant shared they would consider running if they knew that "*the campaign would be competitive and not just a token, with a competent campaign manager, treasurer, campaign committee*" which would provide them the time to do less administrative work and "*focus on being a candidate*".

- **Community Support, An Open Heart, and Tough Skin:** We heard from participants the importance of social capital and their local communities are an important asset that would help them decide to run for office. One participant shared that in addition to community, you also need to have an open mind, a "*belief that you are the right candidate*" even after being tapped on the shoulder to run several times in their career. There is a deep recognition that you have to have "*tough skin*" and be surrounded by community support to create a "*truly representative democracy*".

Ideas to Improve Municipal Politics for Diverse Candidates

This section highlights ideas, strategies, and new directions for AMO to prototype that would contribute to improving the experience of municipal politics for diverse candidates. These ideas range from drawing on existing models of convening, to developing comprehensive resources for diverse candidates to learn about the campaign process.

- **Draw on Existing Models that have Brought Together Diverse Leaders:** Participants have suggested that AMO examine current and past models of fellowships, networks, and initiatives that have brought together diverse leaders. Among these programs includes the FutureBuilds Program by Monumental and the Infrastructure Institute at the University of Toronto and the DiverseCity Fellows Program administered by the CivicAction Leadership Foundation. Participants suggested that AMO you can replicate these models models and connect folks with people who've been in office; people who have a political background and have them assess if that's what i want to do and what will it take; and feel they can build the social capital to get there

- **Develop an Education and Training Portal focused on Campaign Training and Development:** Participants advised that AMO should build a library of resources for diverse candidates that would provide them with the resources and educational materials they need to be guided through the campaign process from beginning to end. One participant suggested modeling this based on the Y Combinator Accelerator, an organization that provides supports for start-ups access mentoring, funding, office hours, and a batch retreat and if this model is adapted within by AMO context it would feature a course on how to run a campaign, manage a war room, engage in door knocking.

- **Reforms and Systems Changes are Needed to Improve Current Conditions:** One participant mentioned how there is a need for many reforms to take place that will create better conditions for diverse candidates to run for municipal office. In the conversation they suggested "elevate formal authority of Indigenous communities, regulate campaign financing, and make changes into how the election body operates".

- **Address Loneliness and Isolation Experienced in the Campaign Process:** In the conversation we heard that the best leaders are the ones who "address the loneliness experienced in those roles". One participant mentioned how loneliness can be felt even by those who have large

communities of practice and large support networks, because when you manage a campaign you have this constant feeling that "everything rests on your shoulders".

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