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Mapping Diverse Experiences in Running for Municipal Office

*Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)
May 2024*





Why this study?

Health of our Democracy

We generated recommendations for AMO and partners, to help make local democracy more inclusive.

Ontario is Changing

Our future success hinges on ensuring we have wide engagement in local democracy.

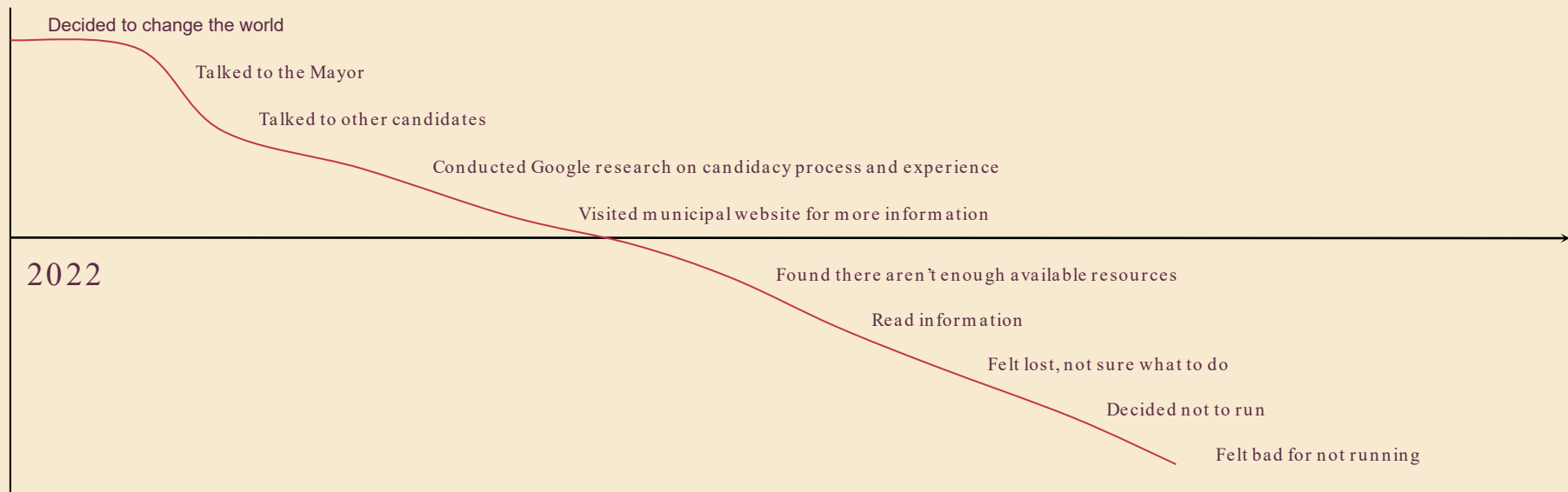
Gaps in our Knowledge

Little work has been at the municipal level to capture diverse candidates experiences.



Toplines

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 these seemingly basic questions.

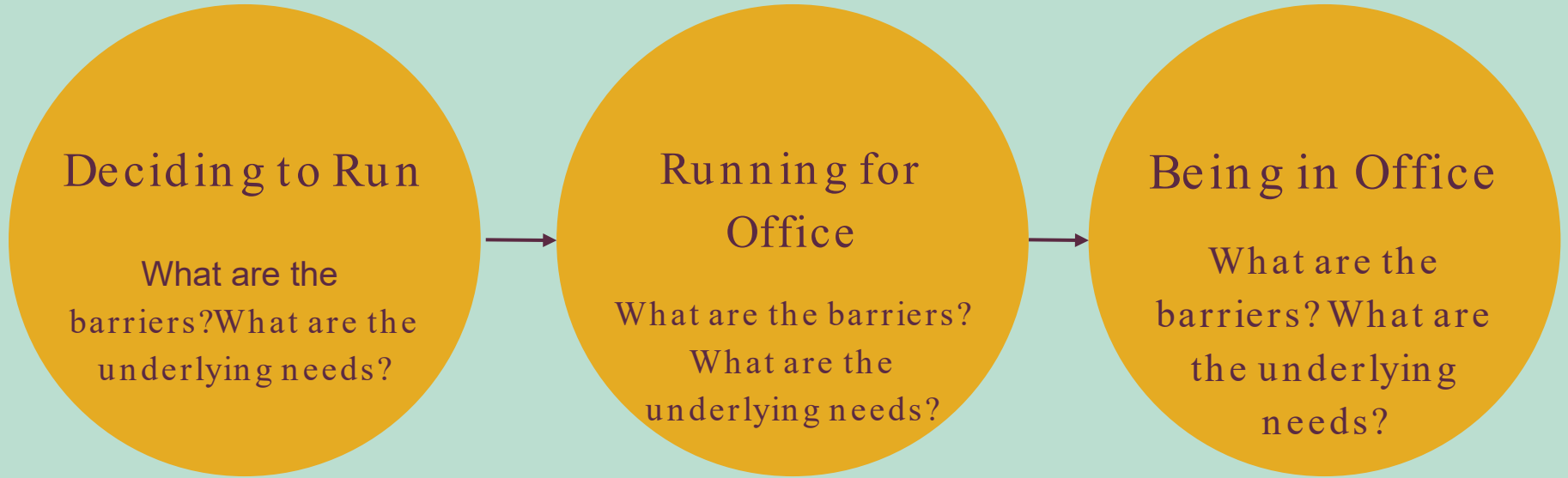




The Risk-Reward paradox

- **It's not certain that over time it will be easier for diverse candidates.** While socially Canada is getting more open in people's views generally (ex. polling data), at the same time politics is getting more toxic
- **For many the risks (negative realities) of running outweigh the potential benefits**
- **The job itself takes a major toll on families, mental health, your career** and is financially precarious
- **Our focus group with potential possible candidates made it clear that many people see change as easier to make, with less personal cost, outside of government**

Mapping the journey into municipal office



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

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

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

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



Our 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?

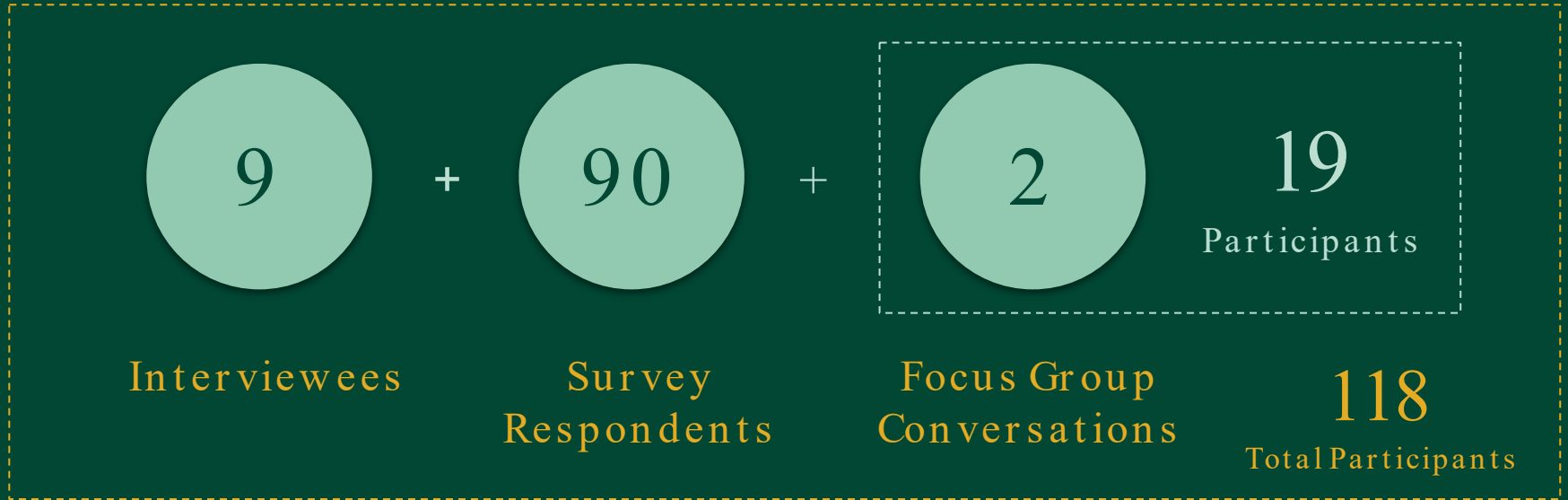


Primary Research

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



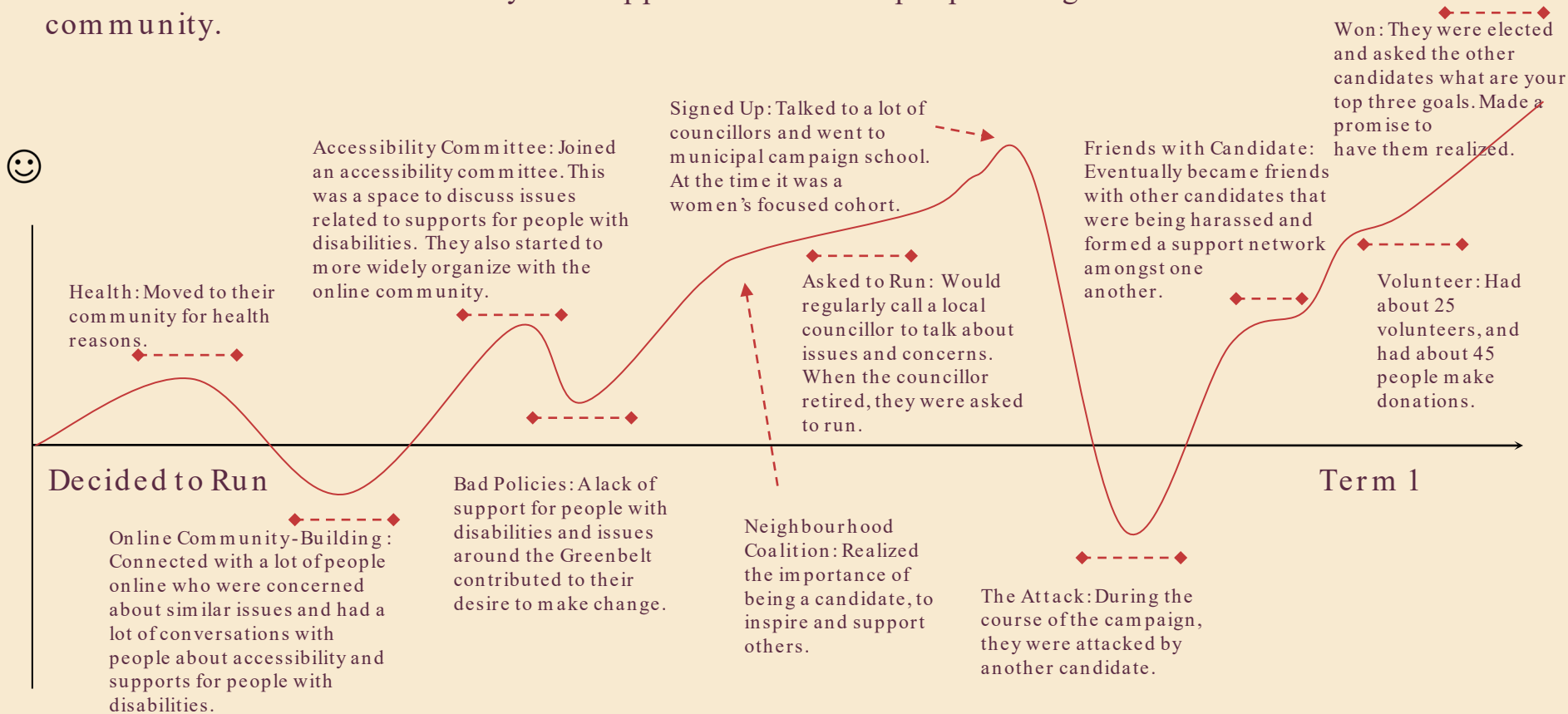
Primary Research Dashboard





Key Findings

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.



Themes and Insights

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- ❖ **What motivated people to run:**
 - Identity Based Motivations
 - i.e. wanting to increase representation
 - Policy Based Motivations
 - i.e. wanting to move forward specific policy wins
 - Place Based Motivations
 - i.e. commitment their local community

Themes and Insights

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❖ Common Enablers and Assets:

- Personal Skills & Capabilities
- Advocates, Mentors and Cheerleaders from Within the System
- Rooted in Strong Community, Identity, and/or Professional Groups
- Timing

Themes and Insights

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❖ Common Barriers

- Timing
 - Incumbents
 - Family and Career Conflicts
- Financial Barriers
- Access to Social Capital: Mentors and Volunteers
- Mental Health Toll: Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination
- Accessibility Challenges



Possible AMO Responses

Interventions to Prototype

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Category 1:

WAYS TO BETTER SUPPORT DIVERSE CANDIDATES

A. Training and Capacity Building

- *Examples could include: Continue and upgrade campaign schools for potential candidates*

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

- *Examples could include: Matchmaking and facilitating connections to donors*

C. Being Okay: Increase Safety and Mental Wellness of Candidates

- *Examples could include: Hotline for reporting harassment or abuse during campaigns*

Interventions to Prototype

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Category 2:

SHIFTING MAINSTREAM CULTURE / ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

- ❖ *Examples could include:*
 - *Anti -Discrimination*
Community Education
 - *Humans of the Horseshoe*

Interventions to Prototype

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Category 3: SYSTEMIC CHANGES & ADVOCACY WORK

- ❖ *Examples could include:*
 - *Anti-Harassment Code of Conduct*
 - *Improve the Conditions of the Job (including: compensation, candidate safety, hours and flexibility)*



Questions?



Thank You!