



RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES
of ALBERTA

RMA MEMBERS GUIDE

to the 2019 Provincial Election



RURAL ALBERTA IS “WHERE IT ALL STARTS”

The RMA wants to work with its members to make sure that all candidates running for provincial office recognize the importance of rural Alberta and, if elected to office, will work towards the interests of rural communities.

The RMA Members Guide to the 2019 Provincial Election will help members educate candidates on the importance of rural Alberta as well as the challenges that rural municipalities face. Feel free to use this guide as you see fit, and share it with candidates, colleagues, and interested members of the public.

In addition to this guide, please visit RMAAlberta.com/election for up-to-date election resources and information, or join the conversation about rural municipal issues on Twitter [@RuralMA](https://twitter.com/RuralMA).

WHY A GUIDE?

This guide is intended to assist members in raising certain province-wide issues as a rural municipal advocate. Some of these issues may not be top of mind in every rural municipality, but they are important to the continued growth and sustainability of rural Alberta, and could become important local issues at any time.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

The RMA has identified five key priority issues for the 2019 provincial election. They are:

1. Including a “rural lens” on all policy decisions
2. Long-term, predictable municipal funding
3. Supporting inter-municipal collaboration in rural Alberta
4. Infrastructure and transportation in rural Alberta
5. Environmental stewardship

For each issue, the guide provides several questions that can be asked to candidates, select RMA position statements, and a brief background of the issue. The questions are intended to be broad enough to be relevant across the province, and easy to modify for specific local issues.

1. Including a “rural lens” on all policy decisions

Alberta is a dynamic province and for many years, growth in Alberta’s urban areas has been among the highest in Canada. Rural Alberta, however, has also seen demographic and economic growth, much of which is tied to natural resource sectors. These trends provide numerous opportunities but also create challenges, specifically in relation to the provision of critical infrastructure and services.

Sample Questions

- ◆ Although the majority of Alberta’s population live in urban areas, most of Alberta’s land mass and resource development is located in rural areas. If you are elected, how would you address the unique needs of rural municipalities?
- ◆ What is the most important aspect of ensuring rural Alberta remains sustainable? Why is this important for the province as a whole?
- ◆ What do you feel is the best approach to balancing the need for municipalities within a region to collaborate with maintaining local decision-making and municipal autonomy?
- ◆ Please discuss what you see as the importance of providing community services such as high-speed broadband and healthcare facilities in rural municipalities. What challenges do you see in providing these services in rural areas, and what strategies would you use to overcome them?
- ◆ What role do you see the Government of Alberta having in ensuring rural municipalities remain sustainable? What relationship should the province have with rural municipalities?
- ◆ Local access to healthcare is important for community viability. How would you ensure there is ongoing support for access to healthcare in rural communities?



Position Statements

- ♦ Rural Alberta is vital to the province's and nation's economy, and it generates a disproportionate share of Alberta's GDP per capita.
- ♦ Rural sustainability is critical to a healthy and vibrant province, and policy decisions must consider the impact on rural Alberta.
- ♦ Rural Alberta is the economic engine that supports the needs of Alberta's large centres.
- ♦ The RMA is your trusted source for information on rural municipalities.
- ♦ Rural municipal perspectives on growth and planning are diverse. Depending on their location within Alberta, some rural municipalities may be dealing with the challenges of rapid growth, while others may be examining ways to stimulate new economic development in rural and remote areas.
- ♦ The presence of hospitals, primary care facilities, and emergency services in rural communities provides not only health benefits, but broader community benefits. These include attracting new residents, stimulating economic growth, and providing opportunities to educate the new generation of health professionals.
- ♦ Broadband internet access is essential to rural community-building and to attracting qualified professionals and industry to rural areas.

Background Information

Rural Alberta's economic role moves far beyond simply hosting natural resources for industries such as oil, gas, forestry, and agriculture. Rural Alberta is the province's economic engine, contributing to the province's GDP at a rate that far exceeds its population.

According to a 2018 RMA report, rural Alberta is home to 41% of the public and private investment in the province, and 26% of the overall provincial GDP. This is significant considering rural Alberta is home to 18% of Albertans. Supporting the important industries and development in rural Alberta requires effective governance, planning, and service delivery. Alberta's rural municipalities fulfill this role and are responsible for providing municipal governance and services to approximately 85% of Alberta's land mass, and by managing

approximately 75% of Alberta's roads and 60% of Alberta's bridges.

This means that the economic prosperity and well-being of all Albertans is intrinsically tied to rural Alberta, and it is important that provincial policy and programming adequately supports the needs of Alberta's rural communities so that they can continue to support key industries throughout the province.

Due to their large geographic size and small populations, providing the services and infrastructure to support strong, vibrant and resilient rural communities comes with unique challenges. Services that may be taken for granted in urban communities (such as health care facilities, schools, libraries, and high-speed broadband) can be expensive and complex to provide in rural communities. By considering how key policy decisions will impact rural Alberta and adopting a "rural lens", the Government of Alberta can understand the important nuances of rural Alberta and make policy, funding, and programming decisions that keep our communities strong, and Alberta's economy thriving.


The provincial government should work with rural municipalities to find innovative ways to provide essential services to rural communities. A healthy rural Alberta means a healthy provincial economy, and the benefits of providing services to rural Alberta should be understood by every candidate.

2. Long-term, predictable municipal Funding

For every tax dollar raised in Canada, municipalities gather less than 10% despite providing an array of services including road maintenance, bridge construction, and water and wastewater treatment. All Albertans rely on these services, and providing them to residents is what makes municipalities the government closest to the people. To cover this shortfall, Alberta's municipalities rely on a patchwork of municipal funding programs provided by the federal and provincial governments. A significant priority in the 2019 provincial election is the future of the Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) program which is set to expire in 2022 and has provided municipalities with \$9.6 billion in infrastructure funding since 2007.

Sample Questions

- ♦ Municipalities rely on long-term predictable funding to allow capital investments to be



properly planned and implemented, and to operate efficiently. If elected, how would you ensure that funding for all municipalities is predictable and long-term?

- ♦ What role do you see municipalities playing in supporting Alberta's long-term fiscal sustainability? Do municipalities currently have the tools and support needed to serve in that role? If not, what tools or support do they require?
- ♦ Municipal funding programs must balance the needs of urban and rural municipalities. What do you believe are important considerations to ensure rural municipalities receive an equitable share of municipal funding?

Position Statements

- ♦ It is vital that the Government of Alberta support municipalities through long-term, predictable, and stable revenue sharing. Without predictable and consistent revenues, it is difficult to plan capital projects, to service interest payments, and to provide consistent levels of service to citizens.
- ♦ Grant funds are a major source of municipal revenues, including the substantial provincial investment made through the Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI). Such grant funding must be long-term and predictable in order to properly support municipal planning needs.
- ♦ Municipalities need additional revenue sources to both diversify their current revenue streams, and to gather additional revenue to maintain and repair rural Alberta's critical infrastructure.
- ♦ Discussions on municipal finances cannot only focus on revenues. To accurately compare the finances of urban and rural municipalities, both revenues and expenditures must be considered. This is because expenses in rural municipalities are often higher than in urban municipalities due to extensive road networks, bridges, and both water and wastewater systems that need to be maintained.
- ♦ The RMA encourages its members to commit themselves to finding local solutions to best address local and regional needs. Within Intermunicipal Collaborative Frameworks (ICFs), cost sharing arrangements are

preferable to revenue sharing because they are relatively easy to administer, and creates equity, accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency.

- ♦ Most municipalities do not have sufficient annual revenues from taxation and grants to build and maintain needed infrastructure. Each year, this infrastructure deficit grows while citizens' expectations increase. Prior to the initiation of any change in governance structure (annexation, amalgamation, dissolution), the infrastructure deficits of all impacted municipalities must be considered, as adding additional responsibilities to an already over-extended municipality may have unintended negative consequences.

Background Information

Rural municipalities face several unique challenges related to funding and providing essential services and infrastructure to Albertans. Many of these challenges relate to the need to provide services across a large geographic area with low population densities. To assist with the costs to provide these services and expansive Infrastructure, the Government of Alberta provides funding for rural municipalities through a variety of grant programs, many of which vary from year to year.

Since 2007, municipalities in Alberta have received significant provincial infrastructure funding through the Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI), but this program is nearing its completion and municipalities are back at the table to work with the Government of Alberta to negotiate a future municipal funding agreement to replace MSI.

For the past decade, municipalities have used their MSI funding for a wide variety of project types such as roads and bridges, transit, water/wastewater, recreation facilities, and many other capital projects that support the provision of core municipal services. For this essential work to continue, municipalities need funding that is predictable, long-term, responsive, and adequate.

The Government of Alberta must work with the RMA to ensure the voices of Alberta's rural municipalities are at the table, and that the unique nature of rural municipalities are reflected in municipal funding programs. This includes considerations for the vast geography and low population density which characterizes Alberta's rural municipalities.



3. Transportation and infrastructure in rural Alberta

Rural roads and bridges serve as important arteries to help Alberta's economy grow by connecting natural resources to national and international transportation corridors. This critical infrastructure provides the oil, gas, forestry, and agriculture industries with access to the natural resources that they depend on. Rural roads and bridges also support access to services such as schools and healthcare and Alberta's breath-taking parks and natural areas. A safe and viable rural road and bridge network is key to supporting the provincial economy and strong rural communities.

Sample Questions

- ♦ If elected, how will you work with rural municipalities to address the funding challenges associated with maintaining a significant portion of Alberta's transportation network?
- ♦ While the Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program has been funded until 2020, long term funding is uncertain. How will you ensure that municipalities receive funding support to ensure that local roads and bridges continue to serve Albertans and the industries that are important to Alberta's prosperity?
- ♦ While industrial development is vital to Alberta's economy, industry places a major strain on Alberta's rural roads and bridges. What role do you see industry having in ensuring that rural transportation infrastructure remains sustainable?
- ♦ Rail safety is often regarded as a federally-regulated issue with tremendous local impacts. What role should the Government of Alberta play in working with municipalities and the Government of Canada to ensure that trains travel safely through Alberta's communities?
- ♦ Due to Alberta's growth, urban transportation infrastructure such as ring roads and light rail are often the most discussed transportation issues in the province. However, rural municipalities are responsible for the majority of Alberta's transportation infrastructure. How would you balance urban transportation needs that are based on population growth with rural transportation needs that are less visible and

based on industrial growth?


- ♦ Where do you see rural transportation infrastructure fitting into the long-term vision for the movement of people and goods throughout the province?

Position Statements

- ♦ Rural municipalities manage large areas of land that often sparsely populated. This means that RMA members manage approximately 75% of Alberta's roads and 60% of Alberta's bridges.
- ♦ Not only does the infrastructure managed by rural municipalities support rural communities, it also supports Alberta's economy by providing access to natural resources.
- ♦ Since rural municipal infrastructure priorities differ so significantly from those in many urban areas, it is critical that provincial and federal funding programs reflect rural realities in their eligibility criteria.
- ♦ Municipal taxation revenues alone are not sufficient to build and/or maintain rural municipal infrastructure networks. As a result, municipalities face an increasing infrastructure deficit.
- ♦ Long-term, predictable funding from other levels of government is necessary to ensure the sustainability of rural Alberta's transportation network and the viability of rural communities.
- ♦ Municipalities are in the best position to determine local infrastructure priorities and should be empowered to meet those priorities.
- ♦ Long-term capital planning and asset management initiatives are important tools to maximize municipal resources in the provision of infrastructure. The RMA encourages these efforts and works with various committees in support of this type of planning.

Background Information

Rural Alberta drives Alberta's economy. Without these critical transportation links, Alberta's natural resources would be unable to reach key processing facilities and markets throughout Alberta, Canada, and beyond. These linkages are key to economic growth and development, as well as the functions



that enable the high quality of life and standards of living that Albertans enjoy. The value of these key linkages can be measured by the fact that 41% of Alberta's public and private investment, and 26% of Alberta's GDP is in rural Alberta despite having only 18% of Alberta's population.

Rural municipalities collectively manage approximately 75% of roads and 60% of bridges in Alberta. This makes transportation and infrastructure a significant priority and a significant expense for rural municipalities. The cost to maintain Alberta's rural municipal transportation network requires funding from all levels of government, but this is an essential investment in Alberta and Canada's prosperity. Rural transportation systems are often the first link for Alberta's resources in a global supply chain and it takes the collective efforts of all levels of government to work together to support a safe, reliable, and well-funded rural resource network.

4. Supporting inter-municipal collaboration in rural Alberta

Sample Questions

- ♦ Municipalities are now required to develop intermunicipal collaboration frameworks (ICFs) with their neighbouring municipalities. What do you see as the benefit of communities working together to provide services? What do you see as the challenges to mandated collaboration?
- ♦ Rural municipalities have as many as 20 ICFs to complete before April 2020. What types of supports would you provide to rural municipalities to ensure that they can meet this timeline?

Position Statements

- ♦ Rural municipalities work collaboratively with their urban neighbours to create strong regions throughout Alberta.
- ♦ Municipalities in rural Alberta have a long history of collaborating with one another to address limited capacities and identify economies of scale to provide residents and businesses with quality services at a reasonable cost.
- ♦ Recent legislative changes have required municipalities to develop collaboration agreements with their neighbours. While collaboration is a positive process, the work

to undertake the development of these agreements may strain municipal capacity and resources, and financial support from the provincial government is key to ensuring the communities can work together to support broader regional initiatives.

Background Information

Albertans expect municipalities to manage their tax dollars efficiently, which is why municipalities often work together to provide services in partnership with their regional neighbours. In a growing province like Alberta, intermunicipal collaboration is more important than ever. In 2016, the Municipal Government Act was amended to require municipalities to coordinate and collaborate on shared services and planning through Intermunicipal Collaboration Frameworks (ICFs) and Intermunicipal Development Plans (IDP).

As a general principle, collaboration between communities is positive as it allows communities to pool resources and achieve economies of scale that would not otherwise be possible; however, mandated ICFs and IDPs strain municipal capacity and autonomy, especially for rural municipalities who may be required to complete agreements with as many as 20 neighbouring municipalities.

Alberta's rural municipalities and the RMA seek the support from the Government of Alberta to ensure that collaboration between neighbouring municipalities can be undertaken in a way that does not strain municipal resources or capacity, and strengthens existing relationships between municipalities.

5. Environmental stewardship

A specific duty of a municipality, as outlined in the Municipal Government Act, is to foster the well-being of the environment. For rural municipalities, this is especially important given that rural municipalities cover 85% of Alberta's land mass. This means that land-use planning and stewardship are important functions for all rural municipalities. In this context, stewardship includes protecting the integrity of Alberta's land, water, and air.

Sample Questions

- ♦ Municipalities have struggled for many years to receive construction permits requiring approvals under the Water Act from the Government of Alberta. How would you improve this system so that municipalities can



start work earlier on critical infrastructure projects?

- ◆ Municipalities are leaders in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and are supported by organizations like the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre (MCCAC). How would you continue to support municipal climate change initiatives?
- ◆ The Alberta Climate Leadership Plan has impacted rural communities to a greater degree than urban communities. How would you support rural communities in future climate change policies and programs?
- ◆ Water management will continue to be an area of importance as the province continues to grow. How will you balance the various demands for this resource?
- ◆ If elected, what will you do to ensure the appropriate funding mechanisms are in place to support water and wastewater infrastructure in all areas of the province?
- ◆ Municipalities have been engaged in the development of regional plans under the Land-use Framework, with the understanding that municipal plans will align with regional plans to provide a cohesive approach to planning. How would you balance the need for local or regional growth with the targets identified under specific regional plans?

Position Statements

- ◆ Municipalities are responsible for land-use planning decisions which take into consideration the environmental impacts of growth, industry activities, development or land-use changes.
- ◆ Municipalities strive to find a balance between being responsible environmental stewards and ensuring their communities are safe and vibrant.
- ◆ Municipalities recognize the risks of climate change and are active participants in programs that aim to reduce impacts for the benefit of current and future generations.
- ◆ When considering climate change related legislation and policies, the Government of Alberta must consider, not only the direct costs to municipalities and rural residents but also the indirect costs that are distributed throughout the rural economy.
- ◆ Environmental responsibility in Alberta

includes consideration of impacts on air, land, water and biodiversity. Municipalities play a key role in front-line environmental management to provide healthy communities for citizens.

- ◆ Environmental stewardship requires effective communication between municipalities, Indigenous communities, the provincial and federal governments, industry, citizens and other stakeholders.

Background Information

Alberta is the only province where the entire land mass, except for national and provincial parks, is municipally managed. Rural municipalities cover 86.5% of Alberta's total land mass and as a result, rural municipalities have a strong relationship with Alberta's land, water, and air, and by extension the broader environment.

As the government closest to rural Albertans, rural municipalities must balance the social, economic, and environmental benefits and costs of the decisions they make because they have a responsibility to provide a level of service to their residents in a manner that reflects the public interest. Rural municipalities practice ongoing environmental stewardship through land-use planning, water management, and the management of growth. Each of these areas have important considerations for climate change and climate change-related policies and legislation.

When working with the Government of Alberta, Alberta's rural municipalities have the local knowledge to balance the competing land-use interests in Alberta. Through effective collaboration, Alberta's environmental resources can be protected while allowing for the growth and development in rural areas that helps drive Alberta's economy forward.

Albertans are proud of Alberta's vast, wild, and natural environment, and it is one of Alberta's most precious assets. Through effective land-use planning in rural areas, the Government of Alberta and rural municipalities are able to balance the ecological needs of Alberta's natural environment with the economic growth and rural community development.