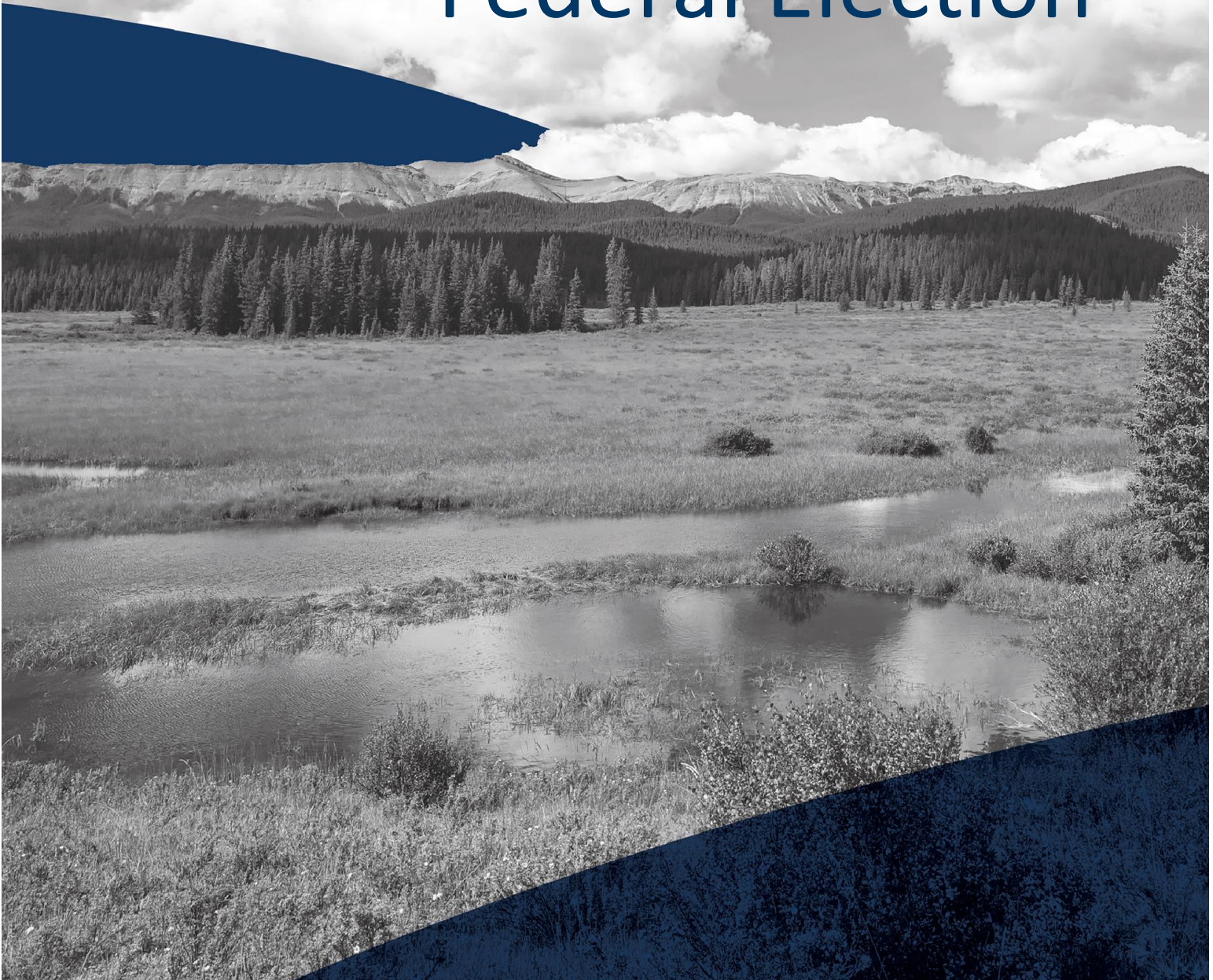




RMA
RURAL MUNICIPALITIES
of ALBERTA

RMA Member Guide to the 2021 Federal Election



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

The RMA Member Guide to the 2021 Federal 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.

Why a Guide?

This guide is intended to assist members in raising certain issues that rural Alberta is facing to help bring awareness to them on the federal level. 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.

How to Use the Guide

RMA has identified four key priority issues for the federal election. These priorities and associated recommendations are included in [RMA's Federal Election Platform](#) that was sent to all Alberta federal candidates and key ministers in the current government. They are:

1. Rural Broadband
2. Disaster Mitigation and Recovery
3. Infrastructure
4. Drought Recovery

For each priority issue, this 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.

Rural Broadband

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought broadband connectivity issues to the forefront, with many rural Albertans struggling to work and learn from home due to lack of high-speed internet and infrastructure challenges. Access to broadband internet service in rural Alberta is key for attracting investment, maintaining local businesses, and allowing all Albertans to participate in the digital economy.

Sample Questions

- ◆ The Government of Canada has committed to providing access to highspeed internet to all Canadians by 2030. What do you view as the biggest barriers to meeting this goal, and if elected how will you address this barrier?
- ◆ How do you view the role of municipalities in the development of broadband infrastructure and services?
- ◆ If you are elected, how will you work address the urban-rural broadband gap?
- ◆ Spectrum bands are used to deploy both rural internet, and increasingly 5G service. If elected, how will you balance these two services to support growth and maintain existing internet options?
- ◆ The Universal Broadband Fund was designed to provide funding to proponents to address gaps in broadband delivery. The fund is highly oversubscribed. If elected, how would you support future broadband funding?

Position Statements

- ◆ Broadband internet is vital for rural businesses and residents to engage in the digital economy.
- ◆ Broadband internet is essential to rural community-building, as well as attracting qualified professionals and industry to rural and remote areas.
- ◆ Many rural and remote areas do not have the population density to attract broadband services based on a business case. Therefore, it may be necessary for municipalities to partner with federal and provincial government agencies and industry groups to ensure their residents' needs are met.
- ◆ Rural areas with low population density and remote communities may not receive broadband service from market forces alone.
- ◆ Any funding programs developed by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) related to improving service in underserved areas must focus on isolated rural and remote areas with the poorest connectivity speeds, and not allow funding recipients to only target areas that are slightly below the minimum threshold.
- ◆ RMA appreciates the Government of Canada's national broadband strategy which outlines the plan to provide broadband internet to all Canadians by 2030, as well as the accompanying Universal Broadband Fund to support this goal.
- ◆ Federal funding must support the long-term maintenance of broadband infrastructure in rural areas. This should include investment through fees collected from communication and internet providers.

Background Information

Rural broadband is a priority advocacy item for RMA. RMA recognizes that access to reliable, fast, and affordable internet is about much more than accessing streaming services. Rural broadband is necessary to attract and retain rural businesses, access tele-health, participate in the digital economy, and participate in the online world. The recent pandemic brought these issues to the forefront, along with new issues such as the requirement to work or attend school from home.

RMA advocates for rural broadband at both the provincial and federal level. Federally, RMA regularly engages in consultations that impact rural broadband on issues such as funding, spectrum policy, and other policy changes that are of particular concern for rural areas. Additionally, RMA is conducting an [internet speed testing](#) project to demonstrate to federal decision makers the current state of rural Alberta's internet. Through this project, RMA has found that only nine percent of tests run to this point meet the federal 50mbps download/10mbps upload standard.

Disaster Mitigation and Recovery

Climate change is being felt across Alberta. Many communities are becoming more vulnerable to a range of impacts including rising temperatures and extreme weather-related events such as floods and wildfires. When these disasters strike, municipalities are the first to respond and it is important that the federal government empowers local leaders with the right tools to protect families and businesses from new weather events.

Sample Questions

- ◆ In Budget 2021, the federal government committed \$1.4 billion over 12 years to top off the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund. One challenge rural municipalities are facing is municipal disaster mitigation funding is normally distributed on a per capita basis. How will your party ensure that a fair portion of funding goes to rural municipalities to address high-risk areas within their boundaries?
- ◆ Local leaders are already making the most of limited tools to protect their residents. If elected, will your government continue to invest funding to work with rural municipalities to build a comprehensive understanding of the full range for risks from climate change and help provide the tools and resources required to reduce those risks?

Position Statements

- ◆ Climate change policy should consider the social, economic and environmental impacts and benefits of agriculture and food production, as well as the ecological goods and services derived from the rural land base.
- ◆ Many rural municipalities lack an opportunity to access funding for project types often linked to climate change mitigation, such as public transit. Climate change requirements and funding programs must be designed to include rural municipalities and allow for developing climate resiliency in rural infrastructure such as roads and bridges.
- ◆ All climate change mitigation and adaptation policies should be accompanied by tangible and realistic performance measures to ensure success and constant improvement, but also to ensure benefits are realized at the least cost.
- ◆ To support a cohesive approach to addressing climate change, municipalities should work collaboratively with their neighbours and Indigenous communities to access programs and leverage resources that will provide local and regional benefits.

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 when climate related disasters strike, local governments are the first to respond. According to an [Insurance Bureau of Canada report](#), severe weather across Canada led to Canadians filing \$2.4 billion dollars in insured damages in 2020, with two of the most expensive events occurring in Alberta: Fort McMurray flooding and a hailstorm in Calgary. Climate adaptation and resiliency has become an important pillar in the Government of Canada's environmental plan and Budget 2021 provided \$1.4 billion over 12 years to Infrastructure Canada to top off the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund to support projects such as wildfire mitigation activities. As the rollout of this funding begins, it must not be distributed strictly on a per capita basis, but rather consider high risk areas as well as communities that may lack the capacity to effectively implement mitigation strategies.

Infrastructure

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 and gas, forestry, and agriculture industries with access to the natural resources that they depend on. Without these transportation links, Alberta's natural resources would not reach processing facilities and markets in Alberta, Canada, and beyond, and Alberta's disproportionate contribution to Canada's economy would be impacted.

Sample Questions

- ◆ If elected, how will you ensure that rural communities across Alberta and Canada have access to the same level of federal infrastructure support as urban areas?
- ◆ How would your party prioritize the development of trade corridors for the movement of Canada's natural resources? How does rural infrastructure fit into these trade corridors?
- ◆ The allocation of federal infrastructure funding has disadvantaged rural municipalities in recent years. How will your party ensure that infrastructure funding is distributed in a way that matches the actual needs of various types of municipalities?

Position Statements

- ◆ Rural municipalities manage the majority of Alberta's roads (77% or 173,226km) and bridges/culverts (61% or 8468). At a cost of between \$500,000 and \$1 million to construct one kilometer of road and a similar cost to construct a bridge or culvert, the costs of managing transportation infrastructure form a significant portion of rural municipal expenses.
- ◆ Rural Alberta's transportation network connects communities, provides rural Albertans with access to important community services (such as healthcare), and supports the province's tourism industry by connecting major highways to many of Alberta's parks and natural wilderness areas.
- ◆ Rural roads and bridges provide the oil and gas, forestry and agriculture industries with access to the natural resources that they depend on. A safe and viable rural road and bridge network is key to supporting the provincial economy.
- ◆ As the primary manager of bridges and roads in Alberta, rural municipalities should be thoroughly consulted before any changes are made to existing infrastructure grant programs, approval processes, or design standards.
- ◆ Industrial use of infrastructure creates significant damage that requires municipalities to allocate a level of financial and human resources not typical in urban areas.

Background Information

Rural municipalities manage about 75% of roads and 60% of bridges in Alberta. This makes transportation and infrastructure a significant priority and expense for rural municipalities. Proper investment in Alberta's rural municipal transportation benefits not only local communities, but also Alberta and Canada. Rural transportation systems are 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.

Despite the outsized role that Alberta's rural municipal infrastructure plays in supporting Canada's economy, recent federal infrastructure programs treat rural infrastructure as an afterthought, with small portions of funding available for general rural support, with the majority being reserved for projects only feasible in large urban centres. To effectively recognize rural economic contributions and the importance of rural communities to Canada's present and future, the federal approach must shift to recognize rural infrastructure needs as unique. This approach would balance support for core rural infrastructure such as roads and bridges with recognition that rural communities are interested in pursuing innovative infrastructure approaches addressing climate change, connectivity, and other emerging challenges, but in a way that aligns with the capacity and geographic realities of rural areas, rather than existing programs that are often tailored to major projects in large cities.

Drought Recovery

Summer 2021 has been a challenge for farmers and agricultural production across the Prairies as severe drought conditions, sustained high temperatures, and wildfires continue to impact operators. Impacts include a lack of available feed for livestock and significantly reduced yields for crop producers. To date, 31 rural municipalities across Alberta have declared agricultural disasters as the extreme weather has caused projected crop yields to drop by as much as 75 percent in some regions.

Sample Questions

- ◆ 2021 saw a major drought across western Canada, causing many municipalities to declare agricultural disasters. If elected, how will you use these declarations to advocate for additional support for the industry?
- ◆ What role do you see the federal government playing in providing direct support to agricultural producers impacted by climate conditions?
- ◆ If elected, what steps would you take to determine whether existing federal programs and funding are adequate to address future agricultural disasters?

Position Statements

- ◆ Agriculture is a vital industry in Alberta and supports the sustainability of our rural communities.
- ◆ Agricultural income is vulnerable to extreme market fluctuations and natural disasters. Federal and provincial programs that provide assistance for producers should be designed to support the industry and address the diversity of conditions experienced.
- ◆ The declaration of an agriculture disaster should trigger additional support for farmers from the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada.

Background Information

Agriculture is a vital industry in Alberta and includes a board range in the types and size of farming operations, from small family operations to large-scale facilities. The agriculture industry can be significantly impacted by global market influences and unpredictable weather and climate fluctuations. Summer 2021 has been a challenge for farmers and agricultural production across the Prairies as severe drought conditions, sustained high temperatures, and wildfires continue to impact operations and livelihoods.

The outcomes of this extreme weather will have lasting financial effects on farmers and ranchers. To support agricultural producers, the federal government announced the early designation of the Livestock Tax Deferral Provision which will allow beef producers who are forced to sell a significant amount of their breeding herd due to drought conditions to offset the resulting revenues with the costs to replace the herd. In addition, the federal government has committed \$100 million through the AgriRecovery disaster relief framework to help farmers affected by the drought. It is important that the federal government continues to provide drought recovery to affected farmers and agricultural producers and engages with the agricultural industry to create tools and resources that will help lessen the impact of extreme weather events in the future.