

BIA ELECTION TOOLKIT

A practical guide for Ottawa's BIAs
— 2026 municipal election



HOW TO USE THIS: This is your internal playbook for the campaign period — how to advocate for your district and engage candidates and Council while staying within the rules. Read it once with your board and staff, then keep it handy through voting day on October 26.

It pairs with two other resources on the hub: the Election Neutrality Guidance (the full compliance rules) and OCOBIA Believes (the coalition's mainstreet priorities). This toolkit is the how-to; those are the rules and the message.

PART 1 — GROUND RULES, IN BRIEF

As a local board of the City, your BIA must stay non-partisan during the election: BIA resources can't be used to support or oppose any candidate. The principle in one line: advocate for issues, never for candidates.

Three things to do before you engage:

- Get the City's Election-Related Resources Policy and either formally adopt it or confirm with the City Clerk that you follow the same rules. It's written for Members of Council and City staff, so don't assume it automatically binds your BIA — confirm your position. (OCOBIA is obtaining the policy centrally and will circulate it.)
- Circulate it to your board and staff so everyone understands the expectations.
- Review what's already scheduled — newsletters, posts, events through voting day — for anything that could read as favouring a candidate.

A "BIA resource" includes staff time, email lists and newsletters, social accounts, offices and meeting space, equipment, your branding and logo, and your website.

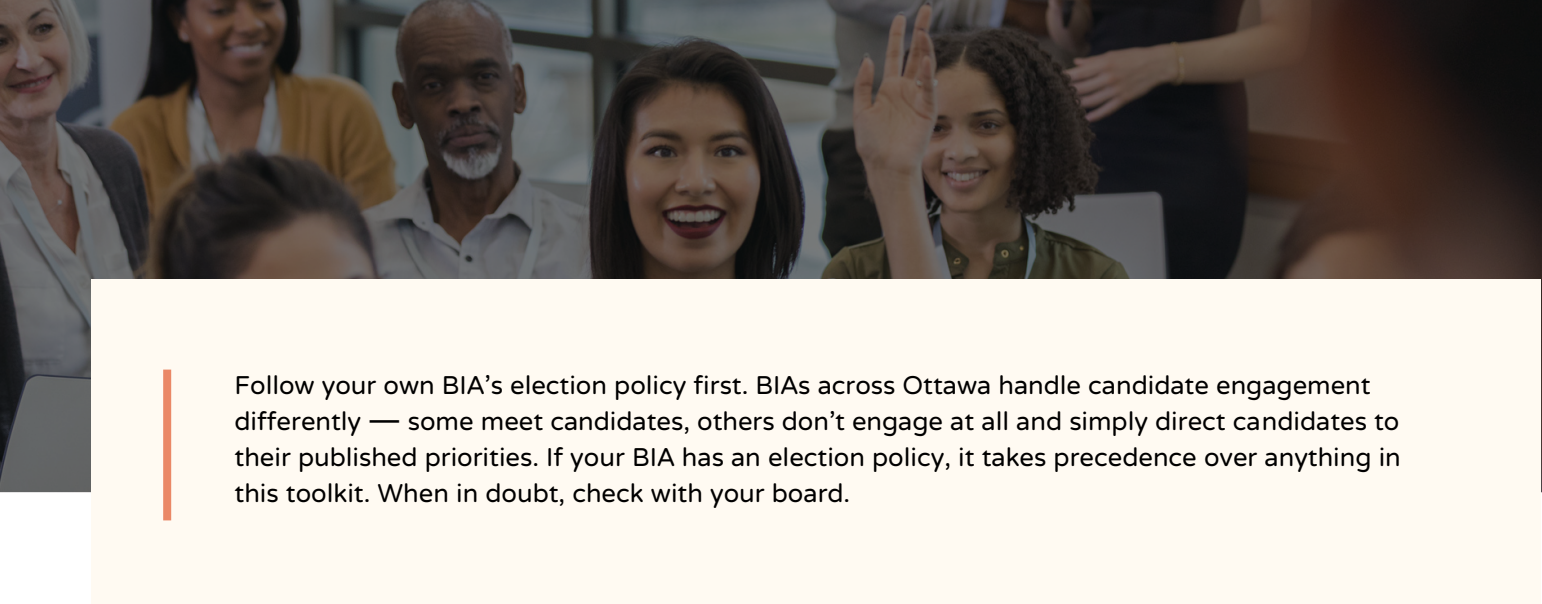
For the full do's and don'ts, the equal-treatment rule, and the pre-send checklist, see the Election Neutrality Guidance — that's the complete compliance reference. This section is just the orientation.

PART 2 — YOUR TALKING POINTS

These are the six OCOBIA Believes priorities, condensed into things you can say in a meeting, a delegation, or a conversation with a candidate or City official. Use the ones that fit your district; localize them with your own examples.

- 1 Local economy — Mainstreet businesses are economic engines. Municipal policy should cut barriers to opening and growing a business, and Council should weigh the impact on businesses before it decides.
- 2 Safe, clean districts — Safe, well-kept commercial districts are economic infrastructure. Businesses shouldn't have to manage complex social challenges alone.
- 3 Transit and connectivity — Businesses thrive when people can reach them. Reliable transit and safe cycling and walking routes are essential, and unevenly shared across a city this size.
- 4 Public space and infrastructure — Well-maintained public space is a shared investment. BIAs need to be consulted early when construction and capital work affect their districts.
- 5 BIAs as partners — BIAs are the eyes on the street. Including them early in planning and policy leads to better decisions and avoids costly ones.
- 6 How BIAs are funded — BIAs are self-funded through a levy on commercial property owners, not City operating dollars. Ottawa's 18 BIAs sit on \$11.99B in assessed commercial value, generate \$396M in municipal commercial taxes, and reinvested \$10.4M back into neighbourhoods in 2025. The return to the city far exceeds what BIAs receive back. (Source: OCOBIA, *The Value of Ottawa's 18 BIAs*, 2025.)

Localize these. Add your own examples — a stalled permit, a specific corridor, a safety issue your members raise. Unlike the coalition-level document, your BIA can be as concrete as it likes about its own district.



Follow your own BIA's election policy first. BIAs across Ottawa handle candidate engagement differently — some meet candidates, others don't engage at all and simply direct candidates to their published priorities. If your BIA has an election policy, it takes precedence over anything in this toolkit. When in doubt, check with your board.

PART 3 — ENGAGING CANDIDATES

Point them to the questionnaire. OCOBIA has sent the same questionnaire to every certified candidate for Mayor and Council. You don't need to build your own — reinforce it. Encourage candidates in your ward to respond, and direct your members to the responses on the hub as they're posted.

If you meet candidates, the rule is equal treatment: if you offer a walkabout, a coffee or a briefing to one candidate, offer the same to all candidates in that race. Keep it about your district and its issues.

Keep it neutral in public. Share that you've invited all candidates and where responses will appear. Don't comment on who responded well or poorly — the responses speak for themselves.

PART 4 — ENGAGING CITY OFFICIALS

The election is also the moment to put mainstreet issues in front of the people who'll carry them into the next term. Bring your OCOBIA Believes priorities into any delegation, submission or meeting with City staff and current Council. Frame them as what your district needs, backed by what your BIA sees on the ground — the eyes-on-the-street evidence no staff report captures.

PART 5 — AFTER OCTOBER 26

The relationship starts at the ballot box, not ends there. In the first 90 days, congratulate the newly elected Mayor and Councillors, introduce your BIA and its priorities, and offer a tour or briefing. OBIAA's Municipal Election Toolkit includes a post-election engagement checklist and sample letters to newly elected officials — use them to move fast while new officials are still forming their priorities.



QUICK REFERENCE

- ☐ Obtained the City's Election-Related Resources Policy
 - ☐ Adopted it, or confirmed your position with the City Clerk
 - ☐ Circulated it to board and staff
 - ☐ Reviewed scheduled comms and events for neutrality
 - ☐ Shared OCOBIA Believes / "Our BIA Believes" with members and candidates
 - ☐ Reinforced the candidate questionnaire in your ward
 - ☐ Applied equal treatment to any candidate meetings
 - ☐ Ready to engage the new Council after October 26
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