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# 2025 CAMPAIGN DEBRIEF

# Letter from the Debrief Committee

As long-time party members and campaign volunteers, we, David Morris, Emily Feairs and Polina Osmerkina, came together out of a shared belief in the Ontario Liberal Party's future.

With experience ranging from David's candidacies in 2018 and 2022 to years of grassroots and professional organizing, we brought both passion and perspective to this debrief, independent of the 2025 campaign.

The 2025 Ontario Liberal Party campaign showed signs of forward momentum. Yet, while there was measurable progress, the overall electoral result fell short of what we as Liberals had hoped to achieve.

In this debrief, we offer a grounded, evidence-informed reflection on the campaign. We have drawn from the perspectives of those closest to the work, including candidates, riding associations, central campaign staff, and volunteers, aiming to surface lessons that can prepare our Party for the next election.

The increase from 9 to 14 seats, alongside gains in vote share and local performance, was an important step forward, with party status restored to the OLP. At the same time, we know there is more work to do to regain competitiveness.

This document is not intended as an exhaustive audit. Rather, it is a targeted summary of post-campaign consultations focused on two key questions:

- What were the operational and strategic conditions that shaped our 2025 result?
- What are the priority areas for reform if the Ontario Liberal Party is to regain competitiveness by the next election?

In compiling this report, we heard from over 1,200 participants through structured interviews, written submissions, and facilitated debrief sessions. We convened two sessions each for candidates and campaign managers, held nine regional meetings and one provincial council session, and conducted one-on-one interviews with members of the Central Campaign team. Together with a party-wide survey, these conversations form the basis of this report.

We have organized our findings into eight sections:

- Fundraising
- Volunteers
- Communications
- Platform
- Leadership and Tour
- Nominations
- Central Campaign Team
- Data and Voter Management

Each section begins with the observations we heard across the debrief process. Following this, we set out recommendations that reflect broader Party values and actions to be implemented before or during the next election. Finally, each section concludes with next steps—tactical and more immediate actions that can be taken within the next 6–18 months.

While this report highlights some of the successes from the election and the contributions of many who worked tirelessly on the campaign, our purpose is forward-looking. We intend this to be a practical roadmap for Party leadership, staff, future candidates, and volunteers, not a retrospective alone.

As a committee, we recognize that not every recommendation in this report will be implemented by the next election. Instead, we see this document as a blueprint to help guide Party leadership toward pragmatic, prioritized action that will meaningfully improve our Party's chances at success.

To provide structure and accountability for this process, we recommend establishing a Campaign Implementation Committee tasked with advancing these recommendations in collaboration with staff, caucus, and grassroots members. In doing so, we can ensure that lessons learned from 2025 are translated into tangible reforms that position our Party for greater competitiveness and success in the years ahead.

We also want to acknowledge this report is being released before the 2025 OLP AGM with the full support of the OLP Leader Bonnie Crombie and the OLP President Kathryn McGarry to demonstrate their and the OLP Executive Council's commitment to accountability and to provide this blueprint to our party on how we can move forward together.

Sincerely,

**David Morris, Emily Feairs  
and Polina Osmerkina**

Ontario Liberal Party 2025 Campaign  
Debrief Committee

# Fundraising

## Observations

Fundraising was repeatedly cited as one of the most successful areas in both the lead-up and during the election. Bonnie Crombie was credited as a significant fundraising asset whose presence helped secure donations and event registration. Only 4.5% of survey respondents cited fundraising as a negative driver during the campaign. Achieving party status was critical in improving the party's financial footing and donor confidence, leaving the organization in a stronger position to plan for the next election.

Proven channels, especially direct mail and always-on digital, delivered dependable returns when executed consistently. Well-timed leader engagement in smaller markets resulted in quick, measurable improvements for local campaigns. A budget of \$15 million is estimated as the realistic resource requirement for the next campaign, which enables a targeted fundraising and spending structure.

One area of measurable progress since 2022 was financial stabilization. The party successfully paid back its 2022 campaign bank loan of \$3 million far ahead of the 2025 election, enabling it to enter the campaign on stable footing with improved donor confidence.

Total campaign spending in 2025 was approximately \$12 million, roughly equal to 2022, despite the election taking place 16 months early, reducing the time available for fundraising and savings. However, campaign spending remained

below the \$13-15 million threshold identified as necessary for province-wide competitiveness.

Several structural issues constrained overall performance. Between elections, the party has always defaulted to a "starvation posture", holding back spending to preserve cash. While that approach was deemed necessary to save money for campaign advertising due to loans and other fixed financial obligations, there are notable consequences. This included reduced institutional memory, slowed list growth, and made ramp-up costly when the writ dropped.

Central fundraising operations were too reliant on volunteers and short-term vendors, with no permanent core of professional fundraisers in place; feedback indicated that dedicated resources were needed under a senior lead. Donor and contact data require stronger hygiene, enrichment, and segmentation, since list quality and late data work limited the ROI of phones, email, direct mail, and paid acquisition. Some survey respondents questioned the efficacy of party ads with 22% reported seeing no party ads during the campaign.

Late nominations suppressed local finance plans, delayed leader integration, and narrowed the runway for candidate-led cultivation. Finally, some fundraising events were priced beyond the reach of many supporters, while regions asked for more accessible, leader-led fundraisers to broaden the donor base and convert engaged volunteers into committed contributors.



## Recommendations

### **Adopt a 24-month, always-on fundraising plan**

Run a standing program for two years with quarterly revenue, retention, and pipeline targets. Keep direct mail and digital active year-round, schedule creative refreshes, and align every major political moment with a matched donation ask so narrative windows convert to revenue.

### **Link nominations to fundraising readiness**

Tie nominations process to basic local finance infrastructure, including a volunteer finance lead, a first-ninety-day fundraising plan and a small-donor base target. Provide a standard local fundraising kit covering event formats, pricing ladders, scripts, and stewardship sequences.

### **Professionalize local finance operations**

Launch a Fundraising College for PLAs and campaign managers that covers compliance, event execution, direct-mail best practices, digital ads, list growth, and donor care. Provide templated budgets, recommended vendors, and simple performance dashboards so local teams can execute confidently.

Add gender-responsive training and mentorship that directly addresses the additional barriers many women face in political fundraising, including unequal access to high-value networks, biased expectations in solicitation, and safety considerations.

## Next steps

### **Stand Up a Permanent Fundraising Team**

Hire a Director of Fundraising, with dedicated fundraising resources with regional portfolios, supported by specialists for digital acquisition, mid-level stewardship, and direct-mail production. Give the team clear targets by region and donor tier, shared dashboards, and weekly performance reviews.

### **Clean up Donor Data**

Complete a list-hygiene sprint to validate emails and phones, unify tagging across ridings and donor tiers.

### **Make the Leader and Caucus a Fundraising Multiplier**

Publish a quarterly regional schedule at accessible price points, standardize booking and follow-up workflows, and set caucus participation targets tied to measurable yield and new-donor acquisition.

# Volunteers

## Observations

To every volunteer who worked on this February election in the midst of cold and snow, we are so grateful for your commitment to our Party and to a more fair and progressive Ontario.

As a committee, we heard countless stories of climbing over snowbanks, avoiding frostbite on fingers and toes, and people working together to overcome the unique challenges that Ford's cynical election timing presented them. We also heard how late nominations and unclear messaging made recruitment harder, and rural and northern geographies compounded low volunteer turnout.

Candidates in particular were so grateful for the volunteer commitment and grassroots organizing which people in their ridings undertook to support their campaigns. The commitment of people to come out and volunteer in the dead of winter had a huge impact on their morale. Simply put, however, there just were not enough volunteers.

Over and over again, we heard about a lack of volunteers available to support local campaigns. While weather was definitely a factor, as a committee, we have real concerns that we are losing engagement and support from our volunteers across Ontario. Our party's base is aging, and we are not attracting enough young people, unions, ethno-cultural communities, and policy-motivated groups to volunteer like we used to.

Some local teams delivered strong campaigns with limited resources and creative community partnerships, despite a short runway for adequate volunteer recruitment. We recommend the Party look at those campaigns and understand what they did that worked and that didn't to see what can be duplicated in other ridings.

We also heard that volunteer intake was also ad hoc, and there was no central mechanism to route people who "put up their hand" to where they were most needed, especially experienced former staffers who wanted to help.

Of the debrief survey feedback, 35% of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that volunteer time was used effectively. The committee believes building up our local grassroots and engaged volunteer base should be a top priority before the next election.

When we were in government, the Ontario Liberals had access to a large number of staffers who could be deployed to ridings across Ontario to mobilize other volunteers.

Both campaign staff and grassroots members noted that we are sometimes still operating from that historical place vs. building a new volunteer-led movement. We need a new path forward to engage Ontarians and better leverage their energy and enthusiasm for change.

## Recommendations

### **Ensure a Volunteer Coordinator in every PLA**

Create a Volunteer Coordinator role in each PLA, responsible for intake, onboarding, scheduling, and retention.

The party office will deliver standardized training for these coordinators and supply a bilingual onboarding manual for new volunteers that includes role descriptions, canvass and phone scripts, safety and accessibility guidelines, equity supports, and a scheduling checklist.

Integrate a shared scheduling tool and a light reporting template so coordinators track contacts, placements, and retention within existing data frameworks (Liberalist).

### **Leverage alumni and former staffers**

Create a formal alumni network with regional leads that mentor local organizers, run monthly skills clinics, and deploy monthly “Riding Spotlight Events” to priority ridings for canvass blitzes and candidate outreach events.

Maintain a specialist roster—data, digital, comms, compliance, and training leads—that ridings can request on short notice, and recognize alumni contributions appropriately to keep the bench active between elections.

### **Take strong positions on issues that can mobilize Ontarians**

Many Ontarians are deeply concerned about where Doug Ford is taking Ontario on specific issues.

Taking strong positions and being visible on issues that have mobilized large groups of Ontarians such as bike lanes and Bill 5 will build our momentum and increase our volunteers.

## Next steps

### **Debrief with Our Most Successful Candidates**

Examine the volunteer engagement and retention strategies of those campaigns which were able to generate the most volunteers and ensure that all PLAs and nominated candidates are aware and leveraging these strategies.

### **Rebuild Local & Youth Volunteer Base In-between Elections**

Engage potential volunteers at local events and through social media campaigns on local issues that mobilize individuals and communities on a desire for change.

Ensure volunteer intake form is routed to both local and central levels with rapid follow up with clear indication of upcoming dedicated local volunteer opportunities and centralized trainings.

### **Run Quarterly Virtual Central New Volunteer Calls**

Provide centralized orientation calls for new volunteers on what to expect when volunteering for the Ontario Liberals. Establish regional volunteer leads that mentor new volunteers and provide regular follow up on upcoming local opportunities.

## **Execute Local Volunteer Coordinator Training**

Deliver a party-run bootcamp that trains a Volunteer Coordinator in every PLA. Alumni can be mobilized as an experienced resource.

Provide coordinators with a ready-to-use training kit (role descriptions, canvass and phone scripts, safety and accessibility guidelines, equity supports, scheduling checklist) and run quarterly province-wide Volunteer Coordinator calls to share inputs to inform training material development.





# Communications

## Observations

Feedback from regional debrief sessions, campaign staff interviews, and the membership-wide survey reflected divergent perspectives on the communications approach during the 2025 campaign.

The central campaign team emphasized the challenges of a snap election and Doug Ford's perceived leadership on both tariffs and the economy as circumstances that made it difficult to break through with our message. They cited Bonnie's credibility on healthcare, strong print media coverage, digital content production, and high levels of online engagement as key strengths of the communications effort.

Local campaigns, however, consistently reported feeling under-resourced when it came to communications support and guidance. While the central platform's focus on healthcare was grounded in pre-campaign focus group testing, many candidates and campaign managers found that voters were more focused on affordability and economic uncertainty. There was a common sentiment that available messaging—particularly around access to doctors—did not align with the issues that resonated most with voters during the short campaign period.

A key concern raised across all regions was the absence of timely, adaptable key messages and communications tools that could be deployed quickly at the local level.

Messaging guidance often came in the form of lengthy documents, which made it difficult for campaigns to identify new or updated content. Local teams expressed a need for clearer direction on which messages could be customized for regional use and when central approval was required—particularly in response to emerging issues or region-specific concerns. There was also a desire for more usable messaging beyond high-level talking points that candidates could confidently use in media interviews, debates, and at the door.

Many participants highlighted the lack of a clear, differentiated message—and a compelling answer to the question “Why should I vote for Bonnie?” Voters were not presented with a clear understanding of what they would gain by voting Liberal or what distinguished the Ontario Liberal Party from the NDP and Progressive Conservatives.

This ambiguity made it harder for candidates to communicate why Liberal leadership mattered in this moment. Many respondents emphasized the need to reassert a distinct Liberal identity—grounded in pragmatic, values-based leadership—while drawing sharper contrasts with both the NDP and Doug Ford's record.

In particular, participants noted that we allowed Doug Ford to define himself. Despite a record marked by policy reversals, scandal, and underperformance, he was able to present himself as a steady hand in uncertain times. We did not sufficiently challenge this narrative or connect his actions to the instability and economic anxiety Ontarians were experiencing.

There was a strong desire to see the party counter Doug Ford's record by highlighting his record of reversals, mismanagement, and misplaced priorities—without veering into reactive or overly negative messaging. Going forward, communications strategy must include a clear, sustained effort to define Ford as a leadership liability—not through reactive critique, but by demonstrating how Liberal leadership is more competent, stable, and aligned with the long-term interests of Ontarians.

Digital advertising stood out as an area with both success and untapped potential. The central digital team produced engaging content at speed and deployed it across channels. Some regional campaigns successfully used Meta advertising to build name recognition and reach local audiences—particularly during periods when in-person outreach was limited due to inclement weather.

However, not all campaigns were equally equipped to run paid or organic efforts, and many teams expressed interest in learning how to build stronger local digital strategies. Training in digital communications was widely identified as a major opportunity to build capacity ahead of the next election.

At the same time, participants emphasized the need to catch up to other political parties in key areas of digital engagement—particularly text messaging. Texting allows campaigns to deliver timely, direct communication to voters, quickly respond to news events, and drive immediate actions such as donations or volunteer sign-ups.

While research was done in the pre-campaign period to determine where the leader held the most credibility, investing in research to better understand what Ontarians care about right now and which messages resonate most effectively may be prudent considering media spend is often the largest portion of the budget. Stronger audience insight will ensure that any paid media strategies are more efficient and impactful.

Across the nine regional sessions, when asked about the overall communications and advertising strategy, roughly one-third of participants said it had a negative effect on their campaign's performance, while only 12% assessed it as having a positive impact.



## Recommendations

### Refine Message Development to Reflect Voter Priorities

Conduct regular, regionally sensitive research to ensure campaign messaging aligns with both the long-term aspirations and immediate concerns of Ontario voters. Track shifts in voter sentiment, issue salience, and engagement trends. Emphasize clarity, emotional resonance, and contrast—not just with Doug Ford, but also with other progressive parties—to clearly answer why voters should choose the Ontario Liberals.

### Establish a Consistent Communications Presence

Maintain a year-round communications presence to increase leader visibility, establish narrative momentum, and build policy familiarity. This includes regular, non-fundraising communications from the central party to PLAs and stakeholders to reinforce brand consistency and public engagement.

### Modernize the Digital Strategy and Funnel:

Clearly differentiate between paid and organic strategies. Build a digital funnel that moves voters from interest to action through values-driven or issues-specific content and audience targeting. Tie all digital activity—ads, petitions, sign-ups—into voter contact infrastructure and localized field goals.

### Strengthen Coordination Between Central and Local Campaigns

Establish clear communication protocols and decision-making structures. Define when the central campaign leads, when regional teams can localize, and how two-way communication—especially for message testing, crisis response, and approvals—should function.

### Re-Establish the Liberal Brand

Define the Ontario Liberals values through communications and actions, positioning them as the party best suited to govern the province through the current challenges and create the opportunities Ontarians care most about. Make it abundantly clear who we are, what we stand for, and why voters would want to choose us.

## Next Steps

### Develop an Issues-Based Engagement Program

Launch a series of petitions or targeted campaigns focused on specific issues or shared values to engage supporters and expand and refine data lists. Collect contact information—including emails and postal codes—to support local PLA outreach, future digital mobilization, and GOTV efforts.

### Create a Strategic Communications Plan

Develop a focused plan to build on Bonnie's current profile and reinforce her position as a steady, credible leader on core Liberal issues. As print media declines in influence, shift resources toward paid media and digital advertising aligned with message architecture and brand priorities.

## **Invest in Text Messaging**

Accelerate mobile acquisition through digital sign-ups, live events, and PLA activity. Use SMS to deepen engagement, test messages, and connect supporters to real-time organizing.

## **Define Engagement KPIs Across the Funnel**

Move beyond impressions and clicks. Track mid- and bottom-funnel metrics such as message retention, issue affinity, volunteer action, and offline conversions. Use these insights to fine-tune messaging and digital targeting in real-time.

## **Create Communications Templates and Protocols for Local Campaigns**

Develop a campaign communications handbook outlining roles, turnaround expectations, escalation paths, and pre-approved customizations. Produce editable templates for literature, ads, signage, and digital content well in advance of the write period.



# Platform

## Observations

Across regional sessions, campaign team interviews, and survey responses, the 2025 campaign platform was identified as one element of the election that participants felt we missed the mark on. While participants acknowledged the value of a shorter, more focused document—especially in contrast to previous, lengthier platforms—many found it lacked the content, tone, and clarity needed to serve as an effective communications tool in a fast-moving campaign.

A recurring theme was that the platform felt overly urban-centric and failed to reflect the concerns of rural, northern, and regional communities. Candidates across geographies reported that the platform did not speak to the issues being raised at the doors, mainly those of tariffs and the economy.

While some appreciated the simplicity of the document, in practice, it offered little substance that could be locally adapted or used to meaningfully respond to voter questions.

The central focus on access to a family doctor was also seen as too narrow. Though it tested well in early research, candidates reported that it failed to resonate broadly enough to serve as a campaign-defining message. It was not clearly connected to a broader critique of the government's healthcare record or to a positive, forward-looking economic vision—both of which were top-of-mind for voters.

With affordability and job precarity dominating the public conversation, many felt the platform did not meet the moment or position the party as a credible alternative.

Timing was another significant concern. While some major themes were introduced through the Leader in the months leading up to the campaign, many candidates expected a more comprehensive platform closer to the writ. The delay left them feeling underprepared for early voting conversations. With the platform itself not released until after advance polls had closed, many felt they missed a key opportunity to define the party's vision when many Ontarians had already cast their ballots.

Participants repeatedly emphasized that the platform must function as a voter-facing communications product—designed to inspire, differentiate, and persuade. From this lens, the lack of economic positioning, absence of regional content, and delayed release were seen as major missed opportunities.



## Recommendations

### Re-Establish the Liberal Brand Through a Communications-First Platform

Ground the platform in plain language, clear contrasts, and a strong economic message that reasserts the Ontario Liberal Party as a champion of the middle class and everyday quality of life. Avoid policy jargon and ensure every commitment is easy to communicate at the door or in the media.

### Treat the Platform as a Core Voter Engagement Tool

Design the platform as a narrative product that lays out the challenges facing the province, critiques the governing party's failures, and clearly explains how the Liberal plan would lead Ontario forward. This includes naming the stakes, offering hope, and using accessible storytelling. Align the platform development process with the advertising, digital, and messaging teams to ensure content can be directly used in campaign materials.

Messaging and rollout should be coordinated to maximize the platform's effectiveness as a tool for voter contact and persuasion.

### Deliver Core Platform Content Well in Advance

Ensure the platform's core ideas and messages are available to candidates and campaigns early in the campaign period—well before advance voting begins. As a third party, early definition helps introduce the party to voters and gives candidates time to internalize and communicate key messages effectively.

Additional policy details can be rolled out strategically, but the foundational pillars should be shared with the field from the outset.

### Build in Structured Regional Input Mechanisms

Establish clear pathways for regional input into platform development without raising expectations or requiring the resources of a full-scale consultation process. The central campaign can retain authorship while drawing on insights from across the province.

Options may include structured idea submissions, feedback loops through Regional Vice Presidents, or issue tracking tools to capture emerging local priorities.

### Center Economic Credibility as a Core Theme

Reinforce the Liberal Party's long-standing identity as the party of the middle class. The economic message should consistently highlight Liberal values of fairness, stability, and opportunity, with every major plank—whether healthcare, education, housing, or climate—connected to a broader narrative about building economic security for Ontarians.

Every commitment must be tied back to the Liberal mission of growing and protecting the middle class.

## Next Steps

### Pilot a Regional Input Tool

Launch a low-barrier process for regional policy ideas and observations, using short forms or structured feedback loops via Regional Vice Presidents to capture emerging issues and suggestions early in the pre-campaign phase.

### Develop a Platform Production Timeline and Rollout Plan

Create a platform production schedule that ensures the core content is finalized and shared with candidates well in advance of the campaign period, with supporting messaging materials available early and updated as needed.

### Embed Communications Staff in Platform Development

Ensure platform writing includes communications and field-facing staff from the beginning, to test framing, develop key messages in real-time, and ensure outputs align with campaign delivery needs.

### Define Platform Tone and Language Principles

Set internal guidance that all platform content must meet a plain-language standard, with a focus on emotional resonance, clarity, and voter-facing utility rather than policy detail or technical complexity.

### Create a Platform Message Guide for Campaigns

Produce a short, door-friendly summary of the platform in plain language that includes talking points, local adaptation guidance, and instructions on how to link each plank back to the broader Liberal economic and values narrative.

### Develop Regional Supplement Materials

While maintaining a concise core platform, produce optional supplemental materials that speak to regional or sector-specific concerns, particularly in northern and rural Ontario, to support local campaign messaging.



# Leadership & Tour

## Observations

While there was an awareness of the Leader across the province from her past role as Mayor of Mississauga, many volunteers heard at the door that voters did not know much about her values or deep experience, especially as a business leader. Conservatives were able to fill this knowledge gap with significant negative advertising, especially in her home community.

The central campaign team identified early on through polling and focus groups that the Leader was not able to compete with Doug Ford on many of the major issues of the election, especially Trump and tariffs. Through focus groups, healthcare was identified as her strongest issue and so became the focus of the campaign. Despite the election loss, the Leader's credibility did measurably go up on the healthcare issue thanks to this focus. Grassroots volunteers and campaigns, however did encounter a lot of challenges from voters about the Leader and the OLP's ability to actually address the healthcare issue.

The Leader's Tour faced significant challenges due to a lack of local resources to support tour stops and more critically due to frequent, last-minute changes in direction. The Leader also had limited staff resources with her at tour stops which affected her performance and confidence when speaking. According to the debrief survey, 26.9% of Ontario Liberals who

responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed that the Leader's tour improved chances of success in their riding and 22.1% of Ontario Liberals agreed or strongly agreed that her tour increased her visibility or improved the Party's results

Throughout the debrief process, local Liberals were dismayed to often hear that the Leader had passed through their riding without stopping or never went through there at all. This issue was especially felt in the South West region of the province and really left local Liberals feeling invisible. We did not win any ridings in the South West and we have much work to do to build back our party's support in that region, however we did grow our support in that region consistent with our provincial performance.

The visuals around the Leader's tour were also not as strong as they could have been with members of the central campaign team citing last minute changes as the main contributing factor. Local campaigns were also asked to mobilize their candidates and local volunteers with very little notice.

The Leader's tour was focused around the early morning press conferences and meeting with Queen's Park press gallery. With waning influence of traditional print media, and our party being challenged to increase local grassroots involvement, it was frequently noted that tour stops would have helped local campaigns gain volunteers and momentum.

## Recommendations

### **Tour needs a clear messaging objective**

A strong tour is directly tied to a clear message which allows the tour team to plan stops in advance which align with the strategy. While changes in tour are inevitable, a clear campaign message and a rough schedule of major stops in advance allows the tour team to select the best locations with the right visuals to support that message.

### **Accurate polling is essential for tour decisions**

Following the election, there were a number of “close” ridings where a visit from the Leader may have made all the difference. We need to ensure our polling is as reliable and accurate as possible to make the best decisions on where to send the Leader.

### **The Leader motivates the grassroots**

While hard decisions have to be made on where the Leader spends her time during a short election period, there are Liberals in every part of Ontario and when a decision is made to not visit their part of the province, it has a real negative impact on their local morale. Consideration has to be given to this impact as well as other important factors such as polling.

### **Incorporate local input into leader’s tour**

Establish targets for pre-writ and during writ tour calendar with regional targets, local earned media plans, and fundraising opportunities. Ensure the Leader is aware and has positions on key local issues.

Local candidates from other ridings in the region should be made aware of relevant tour stops.

When the Leader is not able to visit the riding, ensure the local candidates are equipped with messaging relevant to their communities.

### **Support the Leader with Senior staff**

Leaders need to know they have the best advice at all times in order to perform at their best. Ensuring the leader is always supported by a senior level staff member will help support their ability to connect with each supporter, stakeholder, media outlet and voter they meet with. This senior staff also needs to direct access to the campaign director to best support the Leader.



## Next Steps

### **Empower the Leader to be their best self**

Develop a clear strategy and platform for the Leader that allows them to be authentic and engage directly with Ontarians.

### **Win back ethnocultural communities' trust and support**

Rebuild relationships with the party's base, especially ethnic and cultural communities, to re-energize the Ontario Liberal brand

### **It's time for our Tour Era**

Ensure the Leader is out on the road meeting local Liberals across all of Ontario.

### **Leverage the tour talent within our party**

Develop a strong database and pipeline of experienced and well-trained tour staff to support events between now and the next election and ensure they are ready to handle the demands of a campaign, especially in a snap election.





# Nominations

## Observations

Across interviews and regional meetings, early nominations emerged as a critical driver of campaign readiness. Local candidate quality was a clear advantage, and 45.2% of survey respondents indicated that this was the top positive aspect of the campaign.

Where strong, well-known, or community-rooted candidates were identified early and backed by their PLAs, campaigns gained immediate credibility, experienced faster volunteer growth, and saw earlier fundraising traction, all while integrating with the leader's tour.

Opening nominations sooner could allow these proven candidates to run, get to the doorsteps, and deepen relationships with local leaders, which translates into smoother approvals and quicker readiness. Quality local candidates are the engine of a successful nominations pipeline, and an early, well-resourced process turns that quality into measurable electoral readiness.

In contrast, late approvals compressed timelines for door knocking, local fundraising, signage, and earned media. The 2025 campaign's green light process highlighted structural bottlenecks: the Nominations Committee Commissioner (NomCom) lacked practical authority to move files at pace; social media reviews consumed disproportionate time; decisions from the campaign team arrived late or changed without notice; and documentation was not retained on an accessible central database from previous nomination cycles.

Regions reported too little local input into recruitment, inconsistent RVP support, and uneven readiness in challenging ridings. The delay in leader riding seat selection was cited to have negative ripple consequences in neighbouring ridings.

Multiple voices called for a longer nominations runway, and modern tools, including AI-assisted social media scans, to protect integrity while accelerating throughput. 58% of survey respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the nominations process was transparent and fair.



## Recommendations

### **Hold Nominations 12-18 months Ahead of Anticipated Elections**

Create a clear priority path for strong candidates who wish to run and have PLA support. Established strategic and tiered targets for nominations timelines based on 2025 results, incumbents and existing candidates. Integrate these processes with candidate fundraising recommendations.

### **Resource and empower the Nominations Commissioner and Vetting**

Retain candidate search co-chairs and add deputy commissioners to handle volume and time-sensitive work. Create consistent processes, including defining escalation rules, and give the Nominations Commissioner clear authority to advance low-risk files while flagging exceptions for senior review.

### **Modernize vetting process with risk tiers and AI**

Adopt a tiered risk model that aligns the depth of review with the risk profile. Pilot AI-assisted social media and document scanning so initial screening is faster and more consistent. Provide guidance on social media documentation and privacy for new candidates.

## Next steps

### **Create a Central Nominations Database Owned by the Party Office**

Establish a mechanism to track prospects, package status, interviews, and decisions. Create a central repository for all files, checklists, and decisions so nothing is retained on personal drives and the vetting process for individuals could be cross-referenced for at least two future election cycles. With candidate consent, transfer 2025 election nominations documentation to the centralized database.

### **Launch Quarterly Open Q&A sessions for PLAs and Prospective Candidates**

Co-led by the Nominations team, hold regular meetings to provide one place for timelines, forms, and standards. Use each session to formalize RVP participation by capturing written input on recruitment, local readiness, and stakeholder support, and incorporate status into a shared regional nominations calendar, with relevant timelines.

### **Establish Equity-designated Nominations Strategy**

Building on the 2022 recommendation on woman-only designations, institutionalize equity-designated nominations that include women, Black communities, Indigenous communities, racialized communities, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, and persons with disabilities.

Identify targeted ridings immediately with clear, published criteria and timelines; direct PLAs to begin local prospecting early; and provide supports such as outreach toolkits, mentorship pipelines, translation and ASL services.

# Central Campaign Team

## Observations

This was a snap election and the central campaign team was formalized very close to the election call with some positions being filled after the writ was dropped. Interviews of the team members clearly highlighted how much needed to be done with very limited resources.

These staff were under enormous pressure, but this stress also made some of them approach local campaigns without consideration of the local contexts, making asks which the local campaigns found to be unrealistic, or instances where they felt they were talked down to by the central campaign. Other candidates and campaign managers expressed that they felt they were “on their own” in their local campaigns despite being told they would have resources and support.

Throughout the debrief process, candidates, campaign managers and PLAs did not have a consistent level of service from the central campaign. This was caused by late nominations, unclear roles and expectations, and most critically, limited resources on the central campaign team.

We also heard several staff members praised repeatedly by name for their responsiveness in getting back to local campaigns. These staff should be celebrated for their efforts.

Many ridings reported helpful central staff touches, strong local candidates with deep community ties, and leader visits that, when they happened, lifted morale and local fundraising. Some regions also saw value from combined federal and provincial association meetings that boosted engagement.

Against that, there was persistent frustration about local policy decisions, late or shifting directives, and slow responses from the centre. Rural, northern, and suburban teams felt the campaign was too Toronto-centric, with messaging and resource choices that did not reflect local realities. Nor were local campaigns empowered to speak to local issues that mattered to their constituency if the central campaign had not taken a position. Tour stops often lacked local integration, and late nominations compressed timelines for signage, earned media, and finance plans.

Participants rated the training they did receive as high quality, with CFO and candidate sessions called out as especially useful. Where training was paired with local practice, confidence rose and execution improved.

On the other hand, many teams needed earlier and mandatory training for PLA presidents, campaign managers, data leads, and digital leads. Technical support on Liberalist, phones, social media, and rapid message pivots was inconsistent. Women and other equity-seeking candidates noted the need for tailored media and safety guidance. Awareness of training was relatively low, with 46% of survey respondents indicating that they “didn’t know” about the available training.

There was a lack of French capacity within the central campaign team to provide nuanced French-language support to local campaigns which was noted by affected campaigns as a significant impairment to their efforts. We heard that communicating with Francophone communities is about more than translation. It is about engaging with Franco-Ontarian issues in a meaningful and authentic way.

Relationships in a campaign always vary with some core campaign team members being closer to the leadership than others. During this election, some core team members noted that direct lines of communication were unavailable leaving them unable to get clear direction or information required to effectively execute their roles. Some team members also commented that campaign leadership did not always or often attend in-person meetings making channels of communication more difficult.

## Recommendations

### **Build up our grassroots**

A campaign team can only do so much during a writ period to mobilize a province-wide organization. We need to build a powerful grassroots movement across Ontario before the next election so the central campaign team can engage with them when the campaign begins.

### **Create a clear operating model between central and ridings**

Publish an org chart, contact map, and communications timelines so PLAs and campaign managers know who decides what, how to escalate, and when to expect answers.

### **Create a centralized training hub**

Develop a comprehensive training program and support system for candidates and volunteers, including on technology and communication tools. Ensure these training materials are located in one place, easily accessible to those who need them and based on best practices

### **Establish dedicated PLA training support**

Put dedicated resources in place to support training of PLAs to focus on building up PLAs and addressing their needs. These resources need to cover more than just technological tools and include additional topics like training on voter engagement, campaign management and best practices..

## **Build a year-round, equity-responsive Campaign College**

Offer on-demand video modules, live workshops, and certifications for CFOs, managers, digital, data, comms, and GOTV. Make core modules mandatory. Provide tailored media, fundraising, and safety training for women and other equity-seeking candidates and staff, mentorship cohorts. Translate modules, add ASL where needed, and aim to reduce barriers to participation for those in rural and northern communities.

### **Identify campaign leadership**

Carefully consider the decision to have more than one Campaign Director. There are times when a single leader may not always be the best option or the available option, but clear accountability and organizational structure has real benefits to a central campaign team.

### **Ensure access to campaign directors**

Campaign leadership needs to be accessible to the entire core campaign team, ideally in person.

### **Empower Party President and Exec Council**

Before the selection of Campaign Directors and post election, the OLP Executive and especially the OLP Party President play a critical role in leading the party. It is important for campaign leadership to remain close to the Party President to bring continuity to the party before and after the election.

## **Next Steps**

### **Remember all politics are local**

Field organizers need to identify local leaders who are embedded organizers in communities year-round to map priority local issues, identify and mentor prospective candidates, run continuous volunteer engagement through roles and events, and support accessible fundraising tied to local issues, leader visits and candidate efforts.

### **Empower our regional field team**

Give regional managers clear authority, a shared calendar, and service standards to coordinate tour planning, and pass local insights to central for message and platform development.

### **Start training at OLP AGM**

Members are urgently asking for training as soon as at the upcoming AGM, especially on Liberalist other voter engagement strategies, to ensure volunteers are well-prepared to start the work we need to do now.

### **Look beyond canvassing and MiniVAN**

Consider additional strategies (petitions, community events, traditional lists) to allow grassroots members to engage with Ontarians beyond Minivan and Liberalist with a clear focus on simplifying tools for older adults or newcomers to Ontario. meaningful and authentic way.



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# Data and Voter Mobilization

## Observations

Many respondents found Liberalist and MiniVAN useful for organizing canvasses and recording outcomes, and several campaigns cited voter identification and mobilization as clear positives. A meaningful number of volunteers helped with data entry and list upkeep, showing there is local capacity to maintain clean records when directed.

Targeted, riding-specific materials also proved helpful when they arrived on time, making it easier to turn interest into recorded data and voter mobilization strategies. Feedback indicated that the data provider and digital vendors work best when they are given clear goals tied to real results such as donations, volunteer shifts, usable contacts, and turnout.

Many campaigns struggled with data basics: contact lists were out of date, many phone numbers did not work, and calling programs underperformed as a result. Incentivization for daily contacts did not reflect local strategy or complexities in voter identification. New names gathered online were not reliably shared back to ridings, so digital interest often failed to become usable contacts for door-knocking or GOTV.

People frequently measured clicks instead of real outcomes like donations, volunteer shifts, or confirmed supporters. Participants asked for a simple, consistent way to track which messages and channels drive these results, and for the provider to regularly share clean contact lists with local teams by riding. Several comments recommended year-round cleanup of contact lists.



## Recommendations

### Strengthen data stewardship and quality

Institute province-wide standards for list hygiene and ongoing updates, and make permission-based phone and email capture a routine part of canvassing so every riding maintains accurate, contactable records. Provide dedicated technical support for local campaigns struggling with digital tools and integration for voter mobilization.

### Integrate data operations and require transparent reporting

Create a mechanism to deliver names gathered from emails, petitions, and advertising to each riding with clear source labels; require vendors and the data provider to work towards outcome-based goals and provide regular hand-offs and open, comprehensible reports on spend and results.

## Next steps

### Pilot data refresh in select ridings

Run a comprehensive audit and refresh of local lists in 10-15 high-priority ridings, agree on a small set of quality measures, and share simple before-and-after summaries. Use the results to set province-wide data clean-up processes and reporting best practices.

Survey feedback indicated that roughly 40% of respondents were unsure about the usefulness of core data tools, which cleaner data and clearer reporting can improve.

### Province-wide data clean-up process

Run a province-wide “list clean-up” day in every riding that includes short, practical clinics on data management best practices. Designate riding leads to maintain the integrity of lists.

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**2025 CAMPAIGN DEBRIEF**