

# National Report

## Riding Rebuilding Roundtables

Presented at the  
Ottawa 2012 Liberal Biennial Convention



LIBERAL BIENNIAL CONVENTION  
CONGRÈS BIENNAL LIBÉRAL

  
Liberal

In June 2011, the Ottawa-Vanier Federal Liberal Association held the very first “Riding Rebuilding Roundtable” (RRR) to initiate an open dialogue with people who have expressed an interest in being involved in defining the future of the Liberal Party, in affirming Liberal Party values, and in rebuilding the Liberal Party of Canada. The exercise was one of member and public engagement. The National Policy and Platform Committee promoted the RRR throughout the Party and encouraged all electoral district associations to take part. Flexible guidelines were provided in order for ridings to adapt the activity to their local or regional reality. Each roundtable discussion produced a final report on members’ comments on three questions:

1. Why are you a Liberal?
2. How should the Liberal Party of Canada rebuild?
3. What should the Party do that it is not currently doing?

In total there were over 1,500 individuals from both ridings and commission clubs that participated throughout the country, including both members of the Party and members of the public. The discussions that took place have been compiled into local reports, then regional reports, then this national report. It is interesting to note the commonalities with the National Board of Directors’ Roadmap to Renewal.

A special mention is in order for both the Liberal Party of Canada (Quebec, LPCQ)’s regional roundtables and the Liberal Party of Canada (British Columbia, LPCBC)’s biennial convention in November 2011. LPCQ organized regional roundtables in the Montreal and Quebec regions that drew attendance from the many various ridings and clubs in proximity and had close to 300 in attendance. LPCBC was in a unique position because of the timing of their convention so they ensured that their event was structured as a grassroots process revolving around the upcoming 2012 Biennial Convention and had over 400 in attendance. We are grateful for the work and time that was put in these successful events.

The Party’s national Constitution states that the National Policy and Platform Committee is responsible “to provide a forum for members of the Party to have their say and influence the policies and platform of the Party” (33(2)(a)). The National Policy and Platform Committee consists of the National Policy Chair, the National Policy Vice-Chair, Policy Chairs representing each province and Commission and one Policy Chair representing the territories, each elected by Party members, as well as the of the National Director, National Campaign Co-Chairs, Caucus representatives, and up to four members of the Party appointed as additional members of the Committee by the Leader. (LPC Constitution 33(1))

The National Policy and Platform Committee extend their sincere gratitude to all riding associations, Party members, and members of the public who took part in this important rebuilding exercise. A special mention is in order for the grassroots regional moderators – the regular members who were involved in compiling the *local* regional reports into a *regional* report. These members were instrumental in the development of this national report: Suzanne Maltais (Atlantic), Dr. E. Lawson Drake (Atlantic and Commissions), Gregory Gihoul (Quebec), Rhianon Cowley-Owen and Bill (Ontario), Kevin Taron (Prairies). One last thank you is in order for André Brisebois who put in countless hours at the Party’s national office to ensure the success of this endeavor and the realization of this report.

Finally, we would like to point out that we have used the grassroots regional moderators’ exact words as much as possible in the preparation of this report. Therefore, this national report is truly a compilation of the members’ local and regional rebuilding reports. The National Policy and Platform Committee put much effort into ensuring that the report is authentic and truly representative of members’ views and statements.

Joan Bourassa, National Policy Chair

## **SUMMARY**

### **1. Why are you a Liberal?**

- Liberals are proud of the Liberal Party's history and achievements
- Liberal governments provide a good balance between economy & social justice
- Liberal governments are compassionate
- Liberal governments are good fiscal stewards
- Liberal governments had a positive global reputation

### **Q.1 SUMMARY STATEMENT**

The Liberal Party of Canada subscribes to the common good of all Canadians by providing flexible and open democratic structures and processes which are adaptable to changing circumstances for all who share the belief that democracy requires an engaged, participating, and fully informed electorate.

The Liberal Party of Canada believes in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and in the integrity of the individual in the context of a society that pursues social justice. A Liberal Government is financially responsible and socially responsive, promoting social prosperity for the well being of all Canadians in order to meet its commitments to provide equality of opportunity for all Canadian citizens and to the enhancement of our unique and diverse cultural community, all while preserving the Canadian identity in a global society.

### **2. How should the Liberal Party of Canada rebuild?**

- Articulate a new vision to inspire Canadians
- Strengthen & support electoral district associations
- Increase Member engagement & participation
- Make better use of media (social media & traditional media)
- Strengthen accountability in the Party

### **Q.2 SUMMARY STATEMENT**

With emphasis on strong members and strong ridings that are engaged in their community; a renewed transparent, accountable and forward looking Liberal Party, will develop and support member driven policies and programs that deal with the challenges of the decades ahead. This should be facilitated by strong Leadership from the Party and reinforced links between Caucus and ridings.

### **3. What should the Party do that it is currently not doing?**

- Promote a vision
- Engage its members
- Provide better communication to members & public
- Help electoral district associations foster community engagement
- Ensure policies are in line with Party values

### **Q.3 SUMMARY STATEMENT**

A member owned and driven Party where electoral district associations, supported by Party management and with strong links with their local Liberal and wider communities, will work to clarify the Liberal message, based on a system of feedback, democratic participation and accountability. Forward looking policies will address the challenges of the future while remaining true to Liberal principles supported by a Leadership and management team at all levels of the Party.

## 1. Why are you a liberal?

The rich history and achievements of the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) throughout the years are regarded with pride by the members when asked the reasons why they support the LPC. Liberal governance has a record of balancing fiscal responsibility with social responsibility and a commitment to a just society.

Liberals are proud of their successes; the apex of which is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Equality and dignity are values that are especially important to Liberals, and our constant drive to ensure that all Canadians can share and participate in Canadian life. There is also a profound appreciation for the Liberal record on managing the economy and navigating through the global uncertainties that faced the Liberal government during the 1990's and early 2000's. Paying down debt, maximizing social spending, ensuring a competitive corporate tax rate, and ensuring that Canadians received the benefit of government surpluses proved to be very important to many Liberals. Another key element is the liberal commitment to the public healthcare system. Liberals speak with pride that it was the Liberal Party of Canada that brought in a public healthcare system, a system that many Liberals feel a personal responsibility to uphold and to protect from privatization.

The LPC is a party that respects and believes in sound facts, research based policies, and progressive public policy within fiscal realities. The LPC supports entrepreneurship while maintaining a proper balance with support for individual rights and freedoms and considering policies for the "greater good". While occupying a centrist position, the Liberal Party is open to new ideas from Liberals who think outside the box in order to find solutions that achieve the greatest good.

When asked about values, a general consensus emerged from the members' comments; the main values representing the LPC are a combination of idealism and pragmatism and having the right balance between the economy and social policy. The Party is seen as a party of responsible ideas with a core belief in equality. From that solid foundation we have successfully shaped our Country to the benefit of all Canadians.

Values oriented statements from members emphasized a commitment to democracy, individual dignity as embedded in the Charter of Rights as well as seeking justice for all in a context of individual responsibility and freedom where individuals can pursue and promote change and where government exercises compassion and acts as a force for good. Several other core values stood out such as: equity & equality, tolerance, entrepreneurship, sense of community, commitment to bilingualism, a united Canada, and respect for the integrity of the different spheres of society without ruling out intervention if there was the need. It was often stated that it is imperative that the Party and its Leader truly reflect these values in policy and in their actions and words.

Members strongly emphasized that the Liberal Party must be forward thinking, promote big ideas supported by honest and passionate ethics driven by member participation in Party governance. Members also emphasized a continued commitment to global responsibilities promoting peace keeping, innovation and education on the international scene. On the domestic scene, members emphasized a continued commitment to social responsibility and inclusion, built on equality of opportunity to all individuals, support for the marginalized, a strong commitment to social justice and a viable social safety net.

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## **2. How should the Liberal Party of Canada rebuild?**

The Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) needs a new vision, a new mission and a new set of values that reflects the society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We cannot deny history; let us acknowledge it, apologize for indiscretions and move on. We need to emphasize the Liberal record on Medicare, the Charter, the Constitution, pensions, the Canadian flag. These past successes are an important starting point for revitalization and realignment in Party thinking. Thereafter, adjust by ensuring good communication and organization.

The Party needs to overhaul its operations in order to make the permanent campaign one of engagement that is simpler in structure and that promotes riding cooperation as well as integration in values and policy between Caucus, the Leader and the ridings. This should be premised on strong electoral district associations as the essential building block of the Party. The members stated that centralization is important, but should not be achieved to the detriment of the provincial identity and belonging.

Members have a strong role to play in their ridings as well as in their Party. Members stated that the membership status should be revalued to ensure a greater involvement of members in the Party's processes in order to facilitate a more direct line of communication between the grassroots and the Party officials. Improved communications would increase the members' sense of belonging. One of the ways identified was to ensure that policy development be a more participatory process by having members have access to the development and production of policy decisions. The Party's policy process should be reviewed and adapted to today's realities. The process should engage members and have strong links with riding associations. Members should consider bold forward looking policies that are flexible and adaptable to the changing times based on Liberal values and focused on strengthening the middle class. Selection of the Party's Leader is one of the membership's most important responsibilities. A dynamic Leader should reflect Liberalism (walk the walk) in a way that attracts young people and conveys honesty and humility.

The Party's electoral district associations are the fundamental building blocks of the Party and *should* work on the following:

- Maintain and increase their public profile: Host a minimum of 4 local events per year
- Ensure an involved and engaged policy process for Party members
- Regularly employ modern communication tools
- Work regionally with other ridings and support/mentor ridings in need
- Build a stronger and deeper base in their communities

According to members, the ongoing involvement in local communities for various activities is paramount. Engagement based on Liberal Party values and especially with youth engagement is crucial to Party renewal. Consulting members should become standard practice to better understand the population's needs and wishes. The Party needs to provide the tools, including modern communications tools, as well as the resources to engage with members to enable ridings to have a greater local presence. There is a desire for leadership to assist and guide ridings so that they are positioned to set and achieve goals. A more efficient and co-operative network of riding associations should be encouraged. The party structure, including such a network, should be organized in a more efficient and pragmatic way. For example, we need to identify the differences and needs of urban and rural ridings and develop specific policy proposals to maximize benefit/success at the individual riding level. It was indicated that a system needs to be developed that ensures that electoral district associations are focused on the next election, are fulfilling their obligations to the LPC Constitution and constituents, and building grassroots support at all times. The argument in favour of increasing the role and the field presence of Provincial / Territorial Associations (PTAs) was also strongly defended as well as reinforcing the federated structure of the LPC.

Considering our current status, we should be responsible as the opposition and work for the good of all Canadians, avoiding partisanship and political games. We should focus on our strengths and not on the weaknesses of the other parties. An out-of-power Party needs to maximize and make use of local media to shed light on the real effect of Government policies on "ordinary people". We need more and more effective use of social media, with emphasis on monitoring and updating. At the same time, we must ensure that we are able to reach out to seniors and those who do not have computers or computer skills. Some members expressed comments reflecting concern about 'losing our way' and how we should be more humble. Liberals have a strong sense of values but want to see it more evident in the Leader, the policies and the day to day operations of the Party

It has been noted that we must ensure accountability of all Party officials at all levels of the Party, from ridings, to PTAs, Commissions, and the National Board of Directors. All members should understand their responsibility when they elect fellow members in official Party positions and all elected members to Party positions should recognize their duties towards their fellow members. The Liberal Party of Canada is already a "member based Party" where members have decision-making authority.

We need to plan strategically and come together with common goals that will be followed by all PTAs to support the mission of the LPC. It needs to employ both national and local strategic planning tools and processes and needs to increase transparency and accountability. Members of Parliament should more actively participate in local activities and answer local concerns more visibly. Their role should be strengthened in order to increase their responsibilities and functions.

One of the key and most often made suggestions presented during the discussion on the Party's rebuilding process was a comprehensive participation of grassroots members. The Party should embrace the path leading to the representation of progress, modernity and innovation. Effective and interesting policy that is marketed as simple but powerful issues will become a rallying point for the electorate. Powerful and authentic issues will draw out volunteers, increase our funds, and create

momentum. Policies that are people focused and inspire passion for our country and our communities are the building blocks to rebuild and surpass our expectations.

## **Q.2 SUMMARY STATEMENT**

With emphasis on strong members and strong ridings that are engaged in their community; a renewed transparent, accountable and forward looking Liberal Party, will develop and support member driven policies and programs that deal with the challenges of the decades ahead. This should be facilitated by strong Leadership from the Party and reinforced links between Caucus and ridings.

### **3. What should the Party do that it is currently not doing?**

Renewal requires engagement. Membership needs to be open and accessible and must be seen as being meaningful especially between elections. Engagement must be rooted in grass roots activism and discussion; it is a patient and deliberate process that must address the issues that matter to Canadians and to demonstrate to Canadians that the Party is listening. A culture of meaningful membership needs to be developed by ensuring that democratic practices operate within the party, feedback occurs in both directions and that Party officials at all levels communicate effectively and on an on-going basis with members.

Capacity of electoral district associations must be built to foster community engagement, for example through mentoring programs and partnerships and more community meetings. Ridings need to develop plans and strategies and encourage effective participation at the national level and with local volunteers. Trends and issues must be identified, examined and discussed. The Liberal Party of Canada needs to explore the many social media tools and channels to reach out to its membership and we must learn to speak to youth, understand their specific needs, and work more closely with volunteers. The Liberal Party must have strong outreach operations and continue to build upon the wide use of modern communication technologies that identify target groups, supporters and activists and communicate messages clearly and effectively. The Party and its riding associations must effectively be able to listen to Canadians and represent their views and their needs.

Liberal policy development must be anchored in core values and need to be clear, consistent and inclusive. Policies must capture the public imagination, challenge the opposition, and be assertive rather than defensive of the Liberal vision. We are not the “natural governing Party”. Looking ahead it is important for the Liberal movement to be true to values and principles in full awareness that achieving government needs to be earned and in appreciation that Liberals cannot and will not be “all things to all people”.

The Liberal Party of Canada should articulate a vision of society that embodies a long-term plan in which Canadians recognise themselves. The importance of promoting our vision of Canada, rather than focusing on specific problems, was advocated on several occasions. The Party mission and vision must reflect today’s society and respond to its needs. Society of today wants engagement and transparency and will not tolerate mediocrity. These objectives must be incorporated within the Party principles and processes. Outcomes must be identified, be realistic and be measurable. This will allow the people to see, concretely, the Party’s achievements and successes. It is the Party’s report card and society’s way of knowing if the Party is going in the right direction in meeting its goals: Canadian goals. It must be

clear that the membership is driving the agenda and democratically choosing the policies that underlie the platform.

The Roundtables observed that the Liberal Party of Canada is “miscommunicating” with members and the electorate. What the LPC represents and stands for must be known, must be visible, and must be shared. The LPC must be out in the community promoting who we are and what we can do for this country. We must all share in the same vision and goals and we must earn the trust of our electorate through honesty, integrity, democratic principles and our strong record of social justice and fiscal responsibility. We need to work together as a Party. We need to show strong leadership and a sense of clear direction. Many indicated that engaging in a negative campaign was out of the question. However, we need to show some grit to make an impact and win back the hearts and minds of Canadians, so that they feel confident that together we achieve our desired future.

Members advocated in favor of the establishment of ongoing vertical and horizontal communication channels and new means of interaction as it was argued that the present Party’s communication lacks efficiency and interaction. Comments were made that the Party’s activities were not effectively communicated. In addition some members argued that the Party’s different entities have a tendency to evolve independently from one another and that interactions between them should be developed. Members proposed to establish a “field workers” program that would be involved at the local level and would have a direct link to the National Office to assist in adapting the Liberal message to local realities.

When LPC communicates by email, members stressed that they are too long and that they not only ask for money. Emails should be targeted so that money, information and volunteering are not requested in the same manner. The message included in these emails should be focused on the provinces and territories’ particularities. Participants underlined that reaching members through the targeting of their interests could increase member involvement and also enable the Party to remain close to members’ concerns and ideas.

### **Q.3 SUMMARY STATEMENT**

A member owned and driven Party where electoral district associations, supported by Party management and with strong links with their local Liberal and wider communities, will work to clarify the Liberal message, based on a system of feedback, democratic participation and accountability. Forward looking policies will address the challenges of the future while remaining true to Liberal principles supported by a Leadership and management team at all levels of the Party.

### **Link with National Board of Director’s Roadmap to Renewal**

The National Board of Directors released the Roadmap to Renewal in the month of November 2011. The release was followed by an intense period of consultation, discussion, and debate. It is very interesting to note the similarities between the Roadmap to Renewal and this Riding Rebuilding report, most notably with questions 2 and 3.

The Roadmap to Renewal identified the following major themes and priorities “that are widely understood by Liberals to be both highly inter-related and integral to the Party’s future success”, all of which can be found in the responses expressed in this report and previously described.

1. The future of the Liberal Party depends primarily and directly on the health of its Electoral District Associations (EDAs) and of its provincial and territorial party affiliates.
2. The future of the Liberal Party demands that it modernize itself.
3. The future of the Liberal Party requires it to re-establish a framework of organizational trust.
4. The future of the Liberal Party will be dictated by how well it uses technology.
5. The future of the Liberal Party depends on successfully empowering Canadians who are under-represented in Canada’s political life.
6. The future of the Liberal Party will be best secured if we adopt a culture of continuous outreach and engagement.

Roadmap Key Proposal Topics	Rebuilding Report Q.2* & Q.3*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding the Party</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulate a new vision to inspire Canadians</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging Liberals and Rebuilding the Base</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure policies are in line with Party values</li> <li>• Increase Member engagement and participation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamlining the Party</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen and support electoral district associations and help them foster community engagement</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Transparency and Trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide better communication to members and public and make better use of media (social media and traditional media)</li> <li>• Strengthen accountability in the Party</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing for Victory</li> </ul>	

\*2. How should the Liberal Party of Canada rebuild?

\*3. What should the Party do that it is not doing?

There has been a call in many riding associations for “more sessions like these where the electoral district associations would be seen to be more active in the community”. We are certain that the Liberal Party of Canada’s members and electoral district associations will answer this call and since there are two sides to every coin, we are certain that the Party has heard the need “to strengthen the culture of listening” and “promoting the ‘voice’ of members and supporters”.

It seems that it would be appropriate to revisit and update the concluding statement in the National Board of Director’s Roadmap to Renewal:

We therefore *thank* all Liberals and all Canadians *who’ve joined* us in this vital discussion *these past few weeks*. As we prepare to meet together in person in Ottawa and online across the country during the second weekend of January, we *thank* you all for *having shared* your dreams for Canada and for our Party openly and honestly. Together, we can make those dreams reality.