



## **Finding the good news in Canadian politics**

**Samara Canada's Everyday Political Citizen award seeks to combat all the bad political press by honouring engaged Canadians' good work**

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From recent allegations of sexual harassment to declining turnout rates, we spend a lot of time talking about and covering what's wrong with politics in Canada.

And yet, we have one of the most stable and peaceful nations in the world. Yet, our voter turnout hovers around 60 per cent in both provincial and federal elections, and depending on where you are in the country, your municipal turnout is likely even lower.

That means more than a third of Canadians are so removed from the political process they can't take 15 minutes to shove a piece of paper in a box. So, yes, there's a lot to bemoan. Youth turnout numbers are even more dismal and declining.

But there's also a lot to celebrate, especially at the grassroots level, where community organizers are engaging with their elected leaders to effect change or encourage young people to get involved.

If all we ever focus on is the bad in politics, how can people ever see the good? Or expect politicians to be decent human beings who quite often do the right thing?

That's why Samara Canada, a non-partisan charity dedicated to improving democracy and engagement, honours and highlights the work of those who work to better our country in quiet ways with the "Everyday Political Citizen Awards."

"Whether we like it or not, most major decisions about our communities are still made at the political level. Yet there is little celebration of, and often outright disdain for, those who engage with the political process to try and have a say in those decisions," Samara founder Alison Loat wrote last year about the awards.

This year the pair of awards — one for an adult and another for an engaged citizen under 18 — will focus on youth democratic engagement.

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“Declining voter turnout means even the most common form of political participation is on the wane and that means trouble” said contest juror Rick Mercer. “Shining a light on ways to be involved and influence the process means we might not only get more people involved—we might get better people too.”

All the entries are in and Samara announced this year’s shortlist this week. The awards will be handed out December 3 at ceremonies in Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton. Sixteen judges — who in addition to Mercer included NHL defenseman Grant Clitsome, Edmonton Councillor Michael Walker and former mayor of Iqaluit Madeleine Redfern —whittled a list of 350 down to just 12 finalists.

This year’s short-listed nominees are:

Nicole Chatterton, a teacher from Edmonton, Alberta, who was nominated by parents of one of her pupils’ for her efforts to boost civic engagement through the classroom. In one lesson, she asked kids to design their own ideal city to help them understand planning and policy.

Tim Halman, a teacher from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, who teaches political science and was nominated by a former MLA for his work to get candidates in classrooms during the last general election.

Neeta Kumar-Britten, a political science teacher from Sydney, Nova Scotia, nominated for her 20-year commitment to increasing youth engagement in the political process.

Benoît Langevin, a young man from Montreal who co-founded Action Jeunesse de l’Ouest-de-l’île (AJOI), an outreach program for at-risk youth.

Wendy Lees, a Calgary woman who founded a “create” drop-in art program in her East Village community following the devastation of the 2013 floods.

Patti Melanson, a nurse from Halifax who has spent her career helping those on the fringes who are least likely to access the medical system. She has worked at teen health centres and homeless youth outreach programs and shelters. Currently, she is the co-founder and Nurse Team Leader of the Mobile Outreach Street Health (MOSH) program in Halifax

Lois Miller, a life-long political volunteer from Sackville Nova Scotia, she was nominated by MP Peter Stoffer. Her long CV of volunteer accomplishments include serving as president of her

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local NDP riding association and serving on a committee that “drafted the roadmap for transforming Nova Scotia’s services for persons with disabilities.”

Anubha Momin, a young woman from Iqaluit, Nunavut, who co-runs a community newsblog Finding True North, that informs, entertains and engages her community. Posts include her own work as well as community submissions.

Claire Prashaw, a single mom from Toronto who “currently sits on the executive of a federal party riding association, volunteers regularly in municipal and provincial campaigns, and often participates on parent councils for her son’s non-profit daycare as well as his public school” in addition to her full-time job working for a sitting MPP at Queen’s Park.

Eddie Tang, an 80-year-old Vancouver man described as the “driving force in the Renfrew Chinese Seniors Association.” He also helps people learning English with translation, runs get-togethers to help newcomers connect, and volunteers on myriad other projects.

Kevin Vuong, a young Toronto man who serves on the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy panel and leads the Toronto Youth Cabinet, among his many other activities.

Morgan Wienberg, a young woman from Whitehorse, Yukon, founded Little Footprints Big Steps, an international development organization committed to furthering children’s rights with a focus on work in Haiti. The organization seems to empower future self sufficiency, unlike many NGOs, upon which Haiti, and many other struggling nations, have become reliant.