



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set I Number 6

Rev. September 2000

Set I Strategies for Societies How to Run an Election

by Fran Carter

Supplemental Page

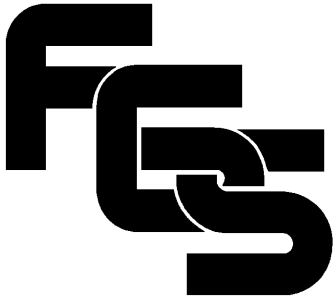
This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

How to Run an Election presents the particulars of fairness and secrecy involved with conducting an election, whether electronic or paper ballot. This paper describes the general rules for proper elections; the authority of the society bylaws in formulating election practices; the role of the nominating committee; an outline of voting principles; descriptions of a good ballot with good candidates; and how to look for leadership qualities in prospective candidates.

The information on page 4 which directs the interested person on how to obtain copies of this paper is incorrect. The FGS office no longer reprints the SSS papers, and has phased out paper copies of the SSS papers altogether.

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Set I Strategies for Societies How to Run an Election by Fran Carter

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of how informal or small an organization is, every election should be conducted as if it could be subjected to the closest scrutiny. From nominations, to vote, to ballot, to count, it is important that the integrity of the election be preserved AND documented.

RULES FOR ELECTIONS

By-laws outline the method to follow when electing officers. First, they identify the officers or positions to be elected. By-laws were considered when the organization was first created, and may have been changed to fit varying situations. The specific time is outlined and prescribed for each event as it leads to the actual elections. By-laws should contain information concerning:

- When the elections are held (annual meetings or __.)
- Nominations—how and when.
- Voting—how and when.

Rules of Order (or procedure manuals) are the written rules of parliamentary procedure adopted by the organization. These usually refer to efficient transaction of business in meetings and usually speak to officers' duties.

Most Rules of Order name an authority, such as *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, and create rules to supplement or clarify the named authority. Rules of Order address such things as:

- How the business meetings are conducted
- Duties of officers
- Standing committee duties

By-laws also address organizational business such as:

- Objectives
- Membership and Dues
- Meetings (schedule, special, business, quorum, etc.)
- Officers (describe office, how elected, term time, etc.)
- Board of Directors (describe office, who is elected, and who is appointed)
- Duties of officers
- Committees (defined, duties etc.)
- Nominations and elections

Following this procedure gives an organization structure and direction. Rules and regulations are guidelines which give parameters within which members must work.

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NOMINATING COMMITTEE

A Nominating Committee may be the most important committee within your organization. The key to the future rests in their hands. The by-laws or Rules of Order usually describe exactly how this committee is initiated and convened, whether appointed from the board or officers, or elected at a general meeting. Whatever mode is selected for determining this committee, great consideration should be taken in choosing members.

The President does not “appoint” a nominating committee and should not serve even as an ex-officio member of a nominating committee. Members who serve on this committee should have a good understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the organization’s office-holders.

Once the committee is in place, and a convener or chairman chosen, a search for nominees begins. Names of persons submitted should be studied carefully. Popularity is not a sufficient reason for choosing a leader.

Qualities and abilities of candidates should be considered before availability. It is a disservice to the organization to select someone because they will “take the job.” The nominating committee should study the duties of each office and search for the candidate(s) most able to perform these duties. The committee should provide the candidate with a job description and hope for a positive response.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Nominating Committee presents a written list of candidates for each available office to the board of directors, usually with written agreement of each nominee to serve if elected. Before the election, the committee formally presents a written report at a regular board meeting.

Nominations should be solicited from the general membership. These names, (after all Rules of Order are observed) accompanied by acceptances,

should be presented to the general membership for election.



VOTING

Voting is the right and privilege of every current member in good standing. Members who reside in various parts of the country should be given the same right and privilege to vote as those who attend an annual meeting.

Voting may be accomplished by voice or by written ballot. If the vote is taken by voice, members unable to attend should have another option. If more than one candidate is proposed for an office, the voting process should always be in writing. The by-laws should provide for such action.

If officers are to be elected by a majority vote, the organization's by-laws should define “majority” as meaning either more than half, or a two-thirds vote.

BALLOTS

Ballots should include:

- Names of candidates and offices to be filled
- Brief biographical information (see below)
- Length of time office is held
- When and where the announcement of those elected will take place
- Instructions for voting
- Instructions for return (see below)

BIOGRAPHY INSERT

The inclusion of candidate biographies along with the ballot is appreciated by members, particularly those who are out of state. These biographies should emphasize the qualifications most suited to the office sought, be brief and pointed, and each should be approximately the same length. It is good practice to let the candidate review their biography before printing and distributing.

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RETURN OF BALLOT

Instructions may require the ballot to be placed in a sealed “blind” envelope (one having no markings). The “Blind” envelope goes into a return envelope prepared by the organization. This return, or “ballot” envelope, should be addressed to the society with a bold entry, “BALLOT.” Space is provided for the voter’s name and return address to verify membership.

Marking a return envelope “Ballot” insures that returns come from only those eligible to vote.

COST SAVERS

When cost is critical, print biographies in reduced print on both sides of the paper. Consider using a ballot that can be reproduced on one third of a sheet, reducing printing and mailing expenses. Both ballot and biographies may be printed on light weight paper.



COUNTING AND REPORTING

A special committee is usually appointed or elected to count and report the ballots. In a mail election, as stated above, two envelopes are used to protect the secret balloting. These are the ballot, or outside envelope, and the “blind,” or inside envelope. Ballot envelopes should be collected and not opened until the deadline has passed. Then, each envelope should be opened in the presence of at least three persons. Their instructions might be:

- a. Verify that return name/address on the ballot (or outside) envelope is on the membership list.
- b. As each ballot envelope is opened, set aside the inside or “blind” envelope to be counted later.
- c. Verify that only one “blind” envelope is in each ballot envelope received.
- d. After all ballot envelopes are opened, they

- e. should be counted, rubber-banded, and labeled with a tally slip giving the count and signed by all three counters.
- f. Match the number of ballot envelopes against “blind” envelopes. The count should be the same.
- g. Open each “blind” envelope within view of all counters.
- h. Begin tally and counting process.
- i. One counter slowly reads each vote and passes the ballot to the second counter to verify as the third counter does the tally.
- j. When completed, repeat the process, with a new tally sheet with each counter taking a different role.
- k. Total both tally sheets and note discrepancies. All counters should again shift roles and votes for the office in question should be read and tallied again.
- l. Ballots should be counted and, with a copy of the tally sheet signed by all three counters, placed in a sealed envelope for storage in a secure place.
- m. A copy of the final tally sheet, signed by all counters, is presented to the Board.

Winners and losers alike should be notified immediately by the nominating committee (or in some cases the counters). The notification process should be written and well understood at the beginning of any election either through the procedure manual or by-laws.

Procedures which prove effective should be written and passed along to next year's committee, or presented to the board for inclusion in a policy statement or procedure manual. The same holds true for something that did not work well.

LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

Cooperation and communication are qualities needed in prospective officers. Each nominee should also have the overall welfare of the organization in mind. Displaying respect, integrity, courtesy, tolerance, compassion, and humility to each society member should be qualities each member should possess, but qualities especially sought in leaders.

Ideals, objectives and the future of the

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organization are at stake when any new officer takes a position. The above qualities should be sought by the nominating committee when selecting candidates and weighed by members when exercising their right to vote.

“Always ask a busy person, they know how to get a job done,” is a quote heard often by a nominating committee. Busy people are usually well organized and energetic. But qualities possessed by the quiet, shy person may be invaluable. It might take time to search for that unsung hero in your membership who is willing, but not the usual volunteer. Look for the individual who gets things done in a quiet manner, with respect for fellow members and pride in membership in their organization.

MORE THAN ONE CANDIDATE

Freedom of choice is what democracy is all about. Whenever possible, select two or more good, qualified candidates for each vacancy to be filled. More than one candidate means there are several people willing to become a part of an active, viable organization. It means the organization is growing and prospering.

Each candidate's abilities and background should be studied; personalities and friendship should be

put aside when voting. Which candidate has the qualities needed for the position? Careful thought and consideration should be spent on your vote.

When you find yourself in the position of being one of two candidates proposed for a vacancy—be thankful. There is more than one person willing to accept such an honor. And if the time comes and the vote is for the other person, then smile, congratulate that person, volunteer to help in any way possible, and mean it. After all, the organization comes first. If you believe in it enough, you should be willing to do your share in the operation and business of OUR organization.

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