

International Council on Archives



Section of Records Management and Archival Professional Associations

CONDUCTING ELECTIONS: GUIDANCE FOR PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

2009

INTRODUCTION

An informal discussion at the 2003 general meeting of Section of Records Management and Archival Professional Associations (SPA) of the International Council on Archives revealed that many associations find it difficult to recruit officers. In these associations, a loyal group of members find themselves carrying the burden of association leadership for many years. It is no surprise that these associations experience difficulty in finding anyone willing to lead.

Some associations, however, have the opposite problem: more members are interested in being an officer than there are posts available. These associations may resolve this situation by creating a rotation in office, based on agreed-upon criteria such as length of membership in the association or geography. Most of these associations, however, resolve leadership questions through elections.

The Section of Records Management and Archival Professional Associations (SPA) of the International Council on Archives provides this guideline to help associations develop good practices as they elect members to their governing bodies. The guidance reflects practices in a number of associations that are members of SPA. It is based on the four principles:

1. A nominating committee recruits candidates and selects the persons who will be on the ballot.
2. Each candidate runs for a specific office.
3. Balloting is secret.
4. A committee of members counts the ballots and announces the winners.

SPA produces a series of guidelines on aspects of association life. This guidance is part of that series. The impetus for the guidance, however, is the increasing interest of associations, particularly ones that are geographically dispersed or that have large memberships, in using an electronic voting system. Consequently, the basic guidance is followed by an Annex providing considerations for adopting an electronic system.

TIMETABLE

The first step in an election process is to establish a timetable for the election. This normally involves counting back from the date of the election (if the balloting is done at a meeting of the association) or the date at which the results are to be announced. A sample timeline might be:

January 1	Nominating Committee begins work; call for nominations sent to members
February 1	Time period for nominations ends
March 15	Candidate selection completed by Nominating Committee

April 15	Candidate materials (CVs, other information) sent to Nominating Committee
May 1	Association office sends ballots and candidate materials to members
June 15	Postmark deadline for mailing back ballots <i>Or</i>
July 1	Meeting of association held and voting completed If mail ballots were used, the counting committee meets, counts ballots and announces election results

NOMINATIONS

Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee may be elected by the membership or the president or the board of the association may appoint it. The Nominating Committee is often three persons; it is always more than one. One person is named as chair and organizer.

The primary function of the Nominating Committee is to select candidates who will stand for election to association offices. Nominations may come from any source, including the membership, the board, and the Nominating Committee.

Call for nominations

Notice of a call for nominations is the beginning of the nominations process. Some associations send out a notice of nominations to the members as a separate mailing; others put the notice in a newsletter; still others include it with the previous year's ballot. The call for nominations should clearly state the closing date for nominations.

Nominations should normally:

- (a) be made in writing;
- (b) indicate the office for which the person is nominated; and
- (c) be accompanied by the written consent of the candidate.

In addition to the nominations made by members or board members, the Nominating Committee formulates its own nominations. If the nominations for a post are lacking or in any way inadequate, it is the responsibility of the Nominating Committee to find qualified candidates to stand for election.

Confirming availability and selecting candidates

The Nominating Committee contacts the nominees for each office to confirm their interest in serving in the post. Nominees may be contacted by phone or e-mail or in person.

The Committee meets and agrees upon the final candidates. Each post should have one or candidates. The chair of the Nominating Committee sends letters, by post or email, to each person nominated, thanking them for their interest.

Obtaining candidate materials

Candidates should prepare a brief professional biographical summary that will be sent to the electors; some associations also ask for a photograph. Some associations also ask the candidates to prepare a short statement; other associations have the Nominating Committee formulate one or more questions to be asked of each candidate. The candidates' responses to those questions or the short statement are included with the CV in the ballot mailing. Candidates must be given 2 to 4 weeks to prepare the necessary materials and return them to the chair of the Nominating Committee.

BALLOTING

Each individual member in good standing is sent a letter from the chair of the Nominating Committee giving instructions for the completion of the ballots, the candidates' biographical and other statements, and the ballot. Some associations include an envelope for returning the ballot; some associations print the ballot on one side of a page that can be folded to make an envelope. The printing and mailing of the ballots can be handled by the chair of the Nominating Committee or by the secretary of the association.

The closing date for the postmarking of ballots must be clearly stated in the instructions. Depending on the postal service in the country, associations allow a reasonable time after the postmark deadline before counting ballots. The ballots are usually returned to the secretary of the association.

For a discussion of electronic balloting considerations, see Annex 1.

ELECTION PROCEDURES

Counting Team

The Nominating Committee usually does not count the ballots. A small group of members, always more than one person, counts the ballots; they may be named by the president or by the board but usually are not elected. They are selected for their reputations as honest, trustworthy, and discreet persons. One person is named as chair and organizer of the Team.

Ballot handling

Only original ballots are counted; photocopies or facsimiles are not allowed. Ballots delivered through the mail are checked for their postmark. Hand delivered ballots and ballots that were mistakenly not postmarked by the postal service are acceptable if they are received by the secretary of the association on or before the postmark date; the

secretary writes the date of receipt on the outside of the envelope. Any ballots not meeting these date deadlines are not counted.

Ballots are not opened until the Counting Team assembles. If the ballot is mistakenly opened, such as the secretary opened the envelope not realizing it was a ballot, the secretary should note on the envelope the error in opening it and the envelope is kept with the ballot until the time of counting.

Counting

The ballots are counted a week to ten days after the postmark deadline, in order to allow all ballots postmarked by the deadline to arrive.

The winning candidate in each contest is whoever has the most votes.

There are many procedures that can be used to count ballots. For example, if the Counting Team is three persons:

1. The ballots are opened and the choices read aloud by one counter while two other counters records the result on the tally sheets. The procedure is then repeated with a different counter reading votes aloud while the other two marked tally sheets. If there is any dispute in the final number of votes for each candidate, the ballots are recounted until consensus is reached.
2. The ballots may be divided into three piles. Each batch is counted once by each of the three counters and recorded on tally sheets. The counts are compared to confirm accuracy.

Some ballots are likely to be invalid, such as a ballot that votes for both of the candidates in a paired race. The Counting Team should jointly review the ballots with questionable validity and decide jointly on whether or not to count them.

If, in any count for election, two candidates receive an equal numbers of votes, the election for that post will be re-balloted. This balloting can be done either at the general meeting of the association or by mail.

A final summary sheet representing the true count of the ballots should be written and signed by all members of the Counting Team.

The chair of the Counting Team retains all ballots and worksheets until the new candidates take office. Then the ballots and worksheets should be destroyed.

NOTIFICATION OF ELECTION RESULTS

The chair sends the results of the election to the president, the secretary, and the Nominating Committee. In some associations the chair of the Nominating Committee notifies the candidates of the results; in other associations the secretary or the president

handles the notification. Candidates are notified by telephone or personal visit before public announcements are made. Efforts should be made to reach all candidates as soon as practicable.

Within two week of the ballot counting, the president sends letters of thanks to all candidates. In the letter to the persons elected, the president confirms the date at which the elected persons take office and invites them to attend the next board meeting (if it occurs before the change of office holders).

Annex

Considerations for Electronic Voting

Associations report that they have adopted electronic balloting (e-ballots) for several reasons:

1. More members participate when e-ballots are used than when paper ballots are used.
2. Voting is cheaper by e-ballot because the association avoids the cost of printing and mailing voting materials.
3. Voting is timelier because it is not dependent on the postal service delivering the ballots.

The major question associations have with e-voting is whether it will be and will be seen by the membership to be secure, accurate and to preserve voter anonymity. If the association simply emails ballots and asks for their return, the return email will identify the sender. So how can anonymity be preserved?

The preferred solution is to use a completely separate entity to collect and count e-ballots. This could be a commercial firm or a trustworthy NGO or it could also be a separate email address set up by the association for the sole purpose of collecting the votes. The entity can be located in any country where connectivity is good.

At its simplest, the e-ballot is sent as an email attachment. The voter downloads the e-ballot, types an “X” in the boxes for the candidates he or she chooses, and mails the ballot back to the entity that will count the votes. The outside entity will download each ballot into a simple file; these anonymized ballots are then used to count the votes (in other words, the counting team will not see the incoming email with the email address on it). The count is made and the results provided to the association.

A more thoroughly automated system provides each voter with access to a voting database. The association sends to the outside entity a file with the email addresses of the members who want to vote by e-ballot. On the day that voting begins, the entity sends each voter an email, giving each a password to use to log into the voting database (once the password is used it is cancelled so a person cannot vote more than once). When the voter is ready to make a choice, he or she logs in, selects the candidates, and logs out. The database automatically calculates the number of votes, and at the end of the voting period the entity provides the e-ballot totals to the association.

It is important to remember that for the foreseeable future, even in the most technologically advanced countries, it will be necessary to have the option of providing paper ballots to persons who do not want an e-ballot. One association sends all its members a “preference” email, asking each member if he or she wants an e-ballot or a paper ballot (persons without an email address are assumed to want a paper ballot). Then

on the day that voting begins, the e-ballots and the paper ballots are sent out along with the election materials. When the deadline for voting is passed, the external entity that receives the e-ballots sends the association the results. The association then adds the e-ballot total and the paper ballot total and makes the final determination.

It is also important to ensure that the outside entity that receives the e-ballots retains the data for at least 30 days following the final announcement of the results. If a voting database is used, the counting of the ballots is likely to be accurate, but challenges can occur. It is wise to retain the data for a sufficient period of time to permit challenges.